

**JOHN
AYSCOUGH**

MARIQUITA: A
NOVEL

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER I | 6 |
| CHAPTER II | 7 |
| CHAPTER III | 9 |
| CHAPTER IV | 11 |
| CHAPTER V | 12 |
| CHAPTER VI | 13 |
| CHAPTER VII | 15 |
| CHAPTER VIII | 18 |
| CHAPTER IX | 20 |
| CHAPTER X | 22 |
| CHAPTER XI | 25 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 26 |

John Ayscough

Mariquita: A Novel

TO SENORITA MARIQUITA GUTIERREZ

Senorita,

It is, indeed, kind of you to condone, by your acceptance of the dedication of this small book, the theft of your name, perpetrated without your knowledge, in its title. And in thanking you for that acceptance I seize another opportunity of apologizing for that theft.

I need not tell you that in drawing Mariquita's portrait I have not been guilty of the further liberty of attempting your own, since we have never met, except on paper, and you belong to that numerous party of my friends known to me only by welcome and kind letters. But I hope there may be a nearer likelihood of my meeting you than there now can be of my seeing your namesake.

That you and some others may like her I earnestly trust: if not it must be the fault of my portrait, drawn perhaps with less skill than respectful affection.

John Ayscough.

CHAPTER I

A whole state, as big as England and Wales, and then half as big again, tilting smoothly upward towards, but never reaching, the Great Divide: the tilt so gradual that miles of land seem level; a vast sun-swept, breeze-swept upland always high above the level of the far, far-off sea, here in the western skirts of the state a mile above it. Its sky-scape always equal to its landscape, and dominant – as the sky can never be imagined in shut lands of close valleys, where trees are forever at war with the air and with the light.

Here light and life seeming twin and inseparable: and the wind itself but the breathing of the light. What is called, by the foolish, a featureless country, that is with huge, fine features, not to be sought for but insistent, regnant, everywhere: space, tangible and palpable, height inevitably perceptible and recognizable in all the unviolated light, in the winds' smash, and the sun's, in the dancing sense of freedom: yet that dancing not frivolous, but gladly solemn.

As to *little* features they are slurred (to the slight glance) in the vast unity: but look for them, and they are myriad. The riverbanks hold them, between prairie-lip and water. The prairie-waves hold them. Life is innumerable present, though to the hasty sight it seems primarily and distinctly absent. There are myriads of God's little live preachers, doing each, from untold ages to untold ages, the unnoted things set them by Him to do, as their big brothers the sun and the wind, the rain and the soil do.

Of the greater beasts fewer but plenty – fox, and timber-wolf, and coyote, and still to-day an antelope here and there.

Of men few. Their dwellings parted by wide distances. Their voices scarce heard where no dwelling is at hand. But the dwellings, being solitary and rare, singularly home-stamped.

CHAPTER II

Mariquita came out from the homestead, where there was nobody, and stood at its verge (where the prairie began abruptly) where there was nobody. She was twenty years old and had lived five of them here on the prairie, since her mother died, and she had come home to be her father's daughter and housekeeper, and all the servant he had. She was hardly taller now, and more slim. Her father did not know she was beautiful – at first he had been too much engaged in remembering her mother, who had been very blonde and fair, not at all like her. Her own skin was dark; and her rich hair was dark; her grave, soft, deep eyes were dark, though hazel-dark, not black-dark: whereas her mother's hair had been sunny-golden, and her eyes bright (rather shallow) blue, and her skin all white and rose.

Her mother had taught school, up in Cheyenne, in Wyoming, and had been of a New England family of Puritans. Her father's people had come, long ago, from Spain, and he himself had been born near the desert in New Mexico: his mother may have been Indian – but a Catholic, anyway.

So, no doubt, was José: though he had little occasion to remember it. It was over fifty miles to the nearest church and he had not heard Mass for years. He had married his Protestant wife without any dispensation, and a judge had married them.

Nevertheless when the child came, he had made the mother understand she must be of his Church, and had baptized her himself. When Mariquita was ten years old he sent her to the Loretto nuns, out on the heights beyond Denver, where she had been confirmed, and made her first Communion, and many subsequent Communion.

For five years now she had had to "hear Mass her own way." That is to say, she went out upon the prairie, and, in the shade of a tree-clump, took her lonely place, crossed herself at the threshold of the shadow, and genuflected towards where she believed her old school was, with its chapel, and its Tabernacle. Then, out of her book she followed the Ordinary of the Mass, projecting herself in mind and fancy into that worshipping company, picturing priest and nuns and school-fellows. At the *Sanctus* she rang a sheep-bell, and deepened all her Intention. At the Elevation she rang it again, in double triplet, though she could elevate only her own solitary soul. At first she had easily pictured all her school-fellows in their remembered places – they were all grown up and gone away home now. The old priest she had known was dead, as the nuns had sent her word, and she had to picture *a* priest, unknown, featureless, instead of him. The nuns' faces had somewhat dimmed in distinctness too. But she could picture the large group still. At the Communion she always made a Spiritual Communion of her own – that was why she always "heard her Mass" early, so as to be fasting.

Once or twice, at long intervals, she had been followed by one of the cowboys: but the first one had seen her face as she knelt, and gone away, noiselessly, with a shy, red reverence. Her father had seen the second making obliquely towards her tree-clump, had overtaken him and inquired grimly if he would like a leathering. "When Mariquita's at church," said José, "let her be. She's for none of us then."

And they let her be: and her tree-clump became known as Mariquita's Church by all the cowboys.

One by one they fell in love with her (her father grimly conscious, but unremarking) and one by one they found nothing come of it. Whether he would have objected *had* anything come of it he did not say, though several had tried to guess.

To her he never spoke of it, any more than to them: he hardly spoke to her of anything except the work – which she did carefully, as if carelessly. If she had neglected it, or done it badly, he would have rebuked her: that, he considered, was parental duty: as she needed no rebuke he said nothing; his ideas of paternal duty were bounded by paternal correction and a certain cool watchfulness. His watchfulness was not intrusive: he left her chiefly to herself, perceiving her to require no guidance.

In all her life he never had occasion to complain that anything she did was "out of place" – his notion of the severest expression of disapproval a father could be called upon to utter.

It was, in his opinion, to be taken for granted that a parent was entitled to the affection of his child, and that the child was entitled to the affection of her father. He neither displayed his affection nor wished Mariquita to display hers. Nor was there in him any sensible feeling of love for the girl. Her mother he had loved, and it was a relief to him that his daughter was wholly unlike her. It would have vexed him had there been any challenging likeness – would have resented it as a tacit claim, like a rivalry.

Joaquin was lonelier than Mariquita. He did not like being called "Don Joaquin"; he preferred being known by his surname, as "Mr. Xeres." One of the cowboys, a very ignorant lad from the East, had supposed "Wah-Keen" to be a Chinese name, and confided his idea to the others. Don Joaquin had overheard their laughter and been enraged by its cause when he had learned it.

He had not married till he was a little over thirty, being already well off by then, and he was therefore now past fifty on this afternoon when Mariquita came out and stood all alone where the homestead as it were rejoined the prairie. At first her long gaze, used to the great distances, was turned westward (and south a little) towards where, miles upon miles out of sight, lay the Mile High City, and Loretto, and the Convent, and all that made her one stock of memories.

The prairie was as empty to such a gaze as so much ocean.

But the sun-stare dazzled her, and she turned eastward; half a mile from her, that way, lay the river, showing nothing at this distance: its water, not filling at this season a fifth of the space between banks was out of sight: the low scrub within its banks was out of sight. Even its lips, of precisely even level on either side, were not discernible. But where she knew the further lip was, she saw two riders, a man and a woman. A moment after she caught sight of them they disappeared – had ridden down into the river-bed. The trail had guided them, and they could miss neither the way nor the ford.

Nevertheless she walked towards where they were – though her father might possibly have thought her doing so out of place.

CHAPTER III

Up over the sandy river-bed came the two strangers, and Mariquita stood awaiting them.

The woman might be thirty, and was, she perceived (to whom a saddle was easier than a chair) unused to riding. She was a pretty woman, with a sort of foolish amiability of manner that might mean nothing. The man was younger – perhaps by three years, and rode as if he had always known how to do it, but without being saddle-bred, without living chiefly on horseback.

His companion was much aware of his being handsome, but Mariquita did not think of that. She, however, liked him immediately – much better than she liked the lady. The lady was not, in fact, quite a lady; but the young man was a gentleman; and perhaps Mariquita had never known one.

"Is this," inquired the blonde lady – pointing, though inaccurately, as if to indicate Mariquita's home, "where Mr. Xeres lives, please?"

She pronounced the X like the x's in Artaxerxes.

"Certainly. He is my father."

"Then your mother is my Aunt Margaret," said the lady in the smart clothes that looked so queer on an equestrian.

"My mother unfortunately is dead," Mariquita informed her, with a simplicity that made the wide-open blue eyes open wider still, and caused their owner to decide that the girl was "awfully Spanish."

Miss Sarah Jackson assumed (with admirable readiness) an expression of pathos.

"How very sad! I do apologize," she murmured, as if the decease of her aunt were partly her fault.

The young man was amused – not for the first time – by his fellow-traveller: but he did not show it.

"You couldn't help it," said Mariquita.

("How very Spanish!" thought her cousin.)

"Of course you did not know," the girl added, "or you would not have said anything to hurt me. And my mother's death happened five years ago."

"Not *really*!" cried the deceased lady's niece. "How wholly unexpected!"

"It wasn't very sudden," Mariquita explained. "She was ill for three months."

"My father was quite unaware of it – entirely so. He died, in fact, just about that time. And Aunt Margaret and he were (so unfortunately!) hardly on terms. Personally I always (though a child) had the strongest affection for Aunt Margaret. I took her part about her marriage. Papa's *own* second marriage struck me as less defensible."

"My father only married once," said Mariquita; "he is a widower."

"Oh, quite so! I wish mine had remained so. My stepmother – but we all have our faults, no doubt. We did *not* live agreeably after her third marriage – " (Mariquita was getting giddy, and so, perhaps, was Miss Jackson's fellow-traveller.)

"I could not, in fact, live," that lady serenely continued, with a smile of lingering sweetness, "and finally we differed completely. (Not noisily, on my part, nor roughly but irrevocably.) Hence my resolve to turn to Aunt Margaret, and my presence here – blood *is* thicker than water, when you come to think of it."

"I met Miss Jackson at – ," her fellow-traveller explained, "and we made acquaintance – "

"Introduced by Mrs. Ploser," Miss Jackson put in again with singular sweetness. "Mrs. Ploser's boarding-house was recommended to me by two ministers. Mr. Gore was likewise her guest, and coming, as she was aware, to your father's."

Don Joaquin, besides the regular cowboys, had from time to time taken a sort of pupil or apprentice, who paid instead of being paid. Mariquita had not been informed that this Mr. Gore was expected.

"So," Mr. Gore added, "I begged Miss Jackson to use one of my horses, and I have been her escort."

"So coincidental!" observed that lady, shaking her head slightly. "Though really – now I find my aunt no longer presiding here – I *really*– "

CHAPTER IV

Don Joaquin expressed no surprise at Mr. Gore's arrival, and no rapture at that of Miss Jackson. But he appeared to take it for granted both would remain – as they did.

He saw more of the young man than of the young woman, which seemed to Mariquita to account for his preferring the latter. *She* had to see more of the lady. Miss Jackson was undeniably pretty, and instantly recognized as such by the cowboys: but she "kept her distance," and largely ignored their presence – a fact not unobserved by Don Joaquin, who inwardly commended her prudence. Of Mr. Gore she took more notice, as was natural, owing to their previous acquaintance. She spoke of him, however, to her host, as a lad, and hinted that at her age, lads were tedious; while frequent in allusion to a certain Eastern friend of hers (Mr. Bluck, a man of large means and great capacity) whose married daughter was her closest acquaintance.

"Carolina was older than me at school," she would admit, "but she was more to my taste than those of my own age. Maturity wins me. Youth is so raw!"

"What you call underdone," suggested Don Joaquin, who had talked English for forty years, and translated it still, in his mind, into Spanish.

"Just that," Sarah agreed. "You grasp me."

He didn't then, though he would sooner or later, thought the cowboys.

Miss Jackson, then, ignored the cowboys, and gave all the time she could spare from herself to Mariquita. When not with Mariquita she was sewing, being an indefatigable dressmaker. She called it her "studies."

"It is essential (out here in the wilderness) that I should not neglect my studies, and run to seed," she would say, as she smilingly retreated into her bedroom, where there were no books.

Mariquita would not have been sorry had she "studied" more. Sarah did not fit into her old habits of life, and when they were together Mariquita felt lonelier than she had ever done before. Indoors she did not find the young woman so incongruous – but when they were out on the prairie together the elder girl seemed somehow altogether impossible to reconcile with it.

"One might sketch," Miss Jackson would observe. "One *ought* to keep up one's sketching: I feel it to be a duty – don't you?"

"No. I can't sketch. It can't be a duty in my case."

"Ah, but in *mine*! I *know* I ought. But there's no feature." And she slowly waved her parasol round the horizon as though defying a "feature" to supervene from any point of the compass.

Though she despised her present neighborhood, Sarah never hinted at any intention of leaving it: and it became apparent that her host would not have liked her to go away. That her presence was a great thing for Mariquita it suited him to assume, but he saw no necessity for discussing the matter, nor ascertaining what might in fact be his daughter's opinion.

"I think," he said instead, "it will be better we call your cousin 'Sarella'. It is her name Sarah and Ella. 'Sarella' sounds more fitting."

So he and Mariquita thenceforth called her "Sarella."

CHAPTER V

Don Joaquin never thought much of Robert Gore; he failed, from the first, to "take to him." It had not delighted him that "Sarella" should arrive under his escort, though how she could have made her way up from Maxwell without him, he did not trouble to discuss with himself. At first he had thought it almost inevitable that the young man should make those services of his a claim to special intimacy with the lady to whom he had accidentally been useful. As it became apparent that Gore made no such claim, and was not peculiarly inclined to intimacy with his late fellow-traveller, Don Joaquin was half disposed to take umbrage, as though the young man were in a manner slighting Miss Jackson – his own wife's niece.

As there were only two women about the place, indifference to one of them (and that one, in Don Joaquin's opinion, by far the more attractive) might be accounted for by some special inclination towards the other. Was Gore equally indifferent to Mariquita?

Now, at present, Mariquita's father was not ready to approve any advances from the stranger in that direction. He did not feel he knew enough about him. That he was sufficiently well off, he thought probable; but in that matter he must have certainty. And besides, he thought Gore was sure to be a Protestant. Now he had married a Protestant himself: and that his wife had been taken from him in her youth had been, he had silently decided, Heaven's retribution. Besides, a girl was different. A man might do things she might not. *He* had consulted his own will and pleasure only; but Mariquita was not therefore free to consult hers. A Catholic girl should give herself only to a Catholic man.

That Mariquita and Gore saw little of each other he was pretty sure, but it was not possible they should see nothing. And it soon became his opinion that, without much personal intercourse, they were interested in each other.

Mariquita listened (without often looking at him) when Gore talked, in a manner he had never yet observed in her. Gore's extreme deference towards the girl, his singular and almost aloof courtesy was, the old man conceived, not only breeding and good manners, but the sign of some special way in which she had impressed him; as if he had, at sight, perceived in her something unrevealed to her father himself. In this, as in most things, Don Joaquin was correct in his surmise. He was shrewd in surmise to the point almost of cleverness, though by no means an infallible judge of character. It did not, however, occur to him that the young stranger was right in this fancied perception, that in Mariquita there was something higher and finer than anything divined by her father, who had never gone beyond admitting that, so far, he had perceived in her nothing out of place.

If anything out of place should now appear he would speak; meanwhile he remained, as his habit was, silent and watchful; not rendered more appreciative of his daughter by the stranger's appreciation, and not inclined by that appreciation more favorably to the stranger himself.

That Gore was not warmly welcomed by the cowboys neither surprised nor troubled him. There were no quarrels, and that was enough. He did not expect them to be delighted by the advent of a foreigner in a position not identical with their own. What they did for pay, he paid for being taught to do – that was the theory, though in fact Gore did not seem to need much teaching. Some, of course, he did need: prairie-lore he could not know, however practised he might be as a mere horseman. Don Joaquin was chiefly a horse-raiser and dealer, though he dealt also in cattle and even in sheep. By this time he had the repute of being wealthy.

CHAPTER VI

It was true that the actual intercourse between Mariquita and her father's apprentice or pupil was much less frequent or close than might be imagined by anyone strange to the way of life of which they formed two units.

At meals they sat at the same table, but during the greater part of every day he was out upon the range, and she at home, within the homestead, or near it. Yet it was also true that between them there was something not existing between either and any other person: a friendship mostly silent, an interest not the less real or strong because of the silence. To Gore she was a study, of profounder interest than any book he knew. To make a counter-study of him would have been alien from Mariquita's nature and character; but his presence, which she did not ponder, or consider, as he did hers, brought something into her life. Perhaps it chiefly made her less lonely by revealing to her how lonely she had been. Of his beauty she never thought – never till the end. Of hers he thought much less as he became more and more absorbed in herself – though its fineness was always more and more clearly perceived by him.

On that first afternoon, when he had first seen her, it had instantly struck him as possessing a quality of rarity, elusive and never to be defined. Miss Jackson's almost gorgeous prettiness, her brilliant coloring, her attractive shapeliness, had been hopelessly and finally vulgarized by the contrast – as the two young women stood on the level lip of the river-course in the unsparing, unflattering light.

That Miss Jackson promptly decided that Mariquita was stupid, he had seen plainly; and he had not had the consolation of knowing that she was stupid herself. She was, he knew, wise enough in her generation, and by no means vacant of will or purpose. But she was, he saw, stupid in thinking her young hostess so. Slow, in some senses, Mariquita might be; not swift of impression, though tenacious of impression received, nor willing to be quick in jumping to shrewd (unflattering) conclusion, yet likely to stick hard to an even harsh conclusion once formed.

These, however, were slight matters. What was not slight was the sense she gave him of nobility: her simplicity itself noble, her complete acquiescence in her own complete ignorance of experience – her innate, unargued conviction of the little consequence of much, often highly desired, experience.

Of the world she knew nothing, socially, geographically even. Of women her knowledge was (as soon he discovered) a mere memory, a memory of a group of nuns – for her other companions at the Convent had been children. Of men she knew only her father and his cowboys. And no one, he perceived, knew her.

But Gore did not believe her mind vacant. That rare quality could not have been in her beauty if it had been empty. Yet – there was something greater than her mind behind her face. The shape of that perception had entered instantly into his own mind; and the perception grew and deepened daily, with every time he was in her presence, with every recollection of her in absence.

Her mind might be a garden unsown. But behind her face was the light of a lamp not waiting to be lit, but already lighted (he surmised) at the first coming of conscious existence, and burning steadily ever since. Whose hand had lighted it he did not know yet, though he knew that the lamp, shining behind her face, her mere beauty, was her soul. Her father was not mistaken in his notion that the young man regarded the girl to whom he addressed so little of direct speech, with a veneration that disconcerted Don Joaquin and was condemned by him as out of place. Not that he, of course, found fault with *respect*: absence of that he would grimly have resented; but a *culte*, like Gore's, a reverence literally devout, seemed to the old half-Indian Latin, high-falutin, unreal: and Don Joaquin abhorred unrealities.

Probably the young man condemned the old as hide-bound in obtuseness of perception in reference to his daughter. As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout she may well have seemed to him. If so, some inkling of the fact would surely penetrate the old horse-raiser's inner, taciturn, but acutely

watchful consciousness. His hide was by no means too thick for that. And, if so again, that perception would not enhance his appreciation of the critic.

Elderly fathers are not universally more flattered by an exalted valuation of their daughters than by an admiring estimation of themselves.

To himself, indeed, Gore was perfectly respectful. And he had to admit that the stranger learned his work well and did it well – better than the cowboys whom Don Joaquin was not given to indulge in neglect or slackness.

He had a notion that the cowboys considered Gore too respectable – as to which their master held his judgment in suspense. In a possible son-in-law respectability, unless quite suspiciously excessive, would not be much "out of place" – not that Don Joaquin admitted more than the bare possibility, till he had fuller certainty as to the stranger's circumstances and antecedents, what he called his "conditions." Given satisfactory conditions, Mariquita's father began to be conscious that Gore as a possible son-in-law might simplify a certain course of his own.

For Sarella continued steadily to commend herself to his ideas. He held her to be beautiful in the extreme, and her prudence he secretly acclaimed as admirable. That she was penniless he was quite aware, and he had a constant, sincere affection for money; but, unless penniless, such a lovely creature could hardly have been found on the prairie, or be expected to remain there; an elderly rich husband, he considered, would have much more hold on a young and lovely wife if she *were* penniless.

That the young woman had expensive tastes he did not suppose, and he had great and not ungrounded confidence in his own power of repression of any taste not to his mind, should any supervene.

Don Joaquin had two reasons for surveying with conditional approval the idea of marrying Sarella – when he should have made up his mind, which he had not yet done. One was to please himself: the other was in order that he might have a son. Mariquita's sex had always been against her. Before her arrival he had decided that his child must be a boy, and her being a girl was out of place. He disliked making money for some other man's wife.

CHAPTER VII

Jack did not like Sarella, and so it was fortunate for that young person that Jack's opinion was of no sort of consequence. He had been longer on the range than anyone there except Don Joaquin, and he did much that would, if he had been a different sort of man, have entitled him to consider himself foreman. But he received smaller wages than anyone and never dreamt of being foreman. He was believed never to have had any other name but Jack, and was known never to have had but one suit of clothes, and his face and hands were much shabbier than his clothes, owing to a calendar of personal accidents. "That happened," he would say, "in the year the red bull horned my eye out," or "I mind – 'twas in the Jenooorey that my leg got smashed thro' Black Peter rollin' on me..." He had been struck in the jaw by a splinter from a tree that had itself been struck by lightning, and the scar he called his "June mark." A missing finger of his right hand he called his Xmas mark because it was on Christmas Day that the gun burst which shot it off. These, and many other scars and blemishes, would have marred the beauty of an Antinoüs, and Jack had always been ugly.

But, shabby as he was, he was marvellously clean, and Mariquita was very fond of him. His crooked body held a straight heart, loyal and kind, and a child's mind could not be cleaner. No human being suspected that Jack hated his master, whom he served faithfully and with stingily rewarded toil: and he hated him not because he was stingy to himself, but because Jack adored Mariquita, and accused her father of indifference to her. He was angry with him for leaving her alone to do all the work, and angry because nothing was ever done for her, and no thought taken of her.

When Sarella and Gore came, Jack hoped that the young man would marry Mariquita and take her away – though *he* would be left desolate. Thus Mariquita would be happy – and her father be punished, for Jack clearly perceived that Don Joaquin did not care for Gore, and he did *not* perceive that Mariquita's departure might be convenient to her father. But Jack could not see that Gore himself did much to carry out that marriage scheme. That the young man set a far higher value on Mariquita than her father had ever done, Jack did promptly understand; but he could perceive no advances and watched him with impatience.

As for Sarella, Jack was jealous of her importance: jealous that the old man made more of his wife's niece than of his own daughter; jealous that she had much less to do, and specially jealous that she had much smarter clothes. Jack could not see Sarella's beauty; had he possessed a looking-glass it might have been supposed to have dislocated his eye for beauty, but he possessed none – and he thought Mariquita as beautiful as the dawn on the prairie.

To do her justice, Sarella was civil to the battered old fellow, but he didn't want her civility, and was ungrateful for it. Yet her civility was to prove useful. Jack lived in a shed at the end of the stables, where he ate and slept, and mended his clothes sitting up in bed, and wearing (then only) a large pair of spectacles, though half a pair would have been enough. He cooked his own food, though Mariquita would have cooked it for him if he would have let her.

Sarella loved good eating, and on her coming it irritated her to see so much excellent food "made so little of." Presently she gave specimens of her own superior science, and Don Joaquin approved, as did the cowboys.

"Jack," she said to him one day, "do you ever eat anything but stew from year's end to year's end?"

"I eats bread, too, and likewise corn porridge," Jack replied coldly.

"I could tell you how to make more of your meat – I should think you'd sicken of stew everlastingly."

"There's worse than stew," he suggested.

"I don't know what's worse, then," the young lady retorted, wrinkling her very pretty nose.

"None. That's worse," said Jack, triumphantly.

"It seems to me," Sarella observed thoughtfully, "as if you're growing a bit oldish to do for yourself, and have no one to do anything for you. An elderly man wants a woman to keep him comfortable."

Jack snorted, but Sarella, undefeated, proceeded to put the case of his being ill. Who would nurse him?

"Ill! I've too much to do for sech idleness. The Boss'd stare if I laid out to get ill."

"Illness," Sarella remarked piously, "comes from Above, and may come any day. Haven't you anyone belonging to you, Jack? No sister, no niece; you never were married, I suppose, so I don't mention a daughter."

"I *was* married, though," Jack explained, much delighted, "and had a daughter, too."

"You quite surprise me!" cried Sarella, "quite!"

"She didn't marry me for my looks, my wife didn't," chuckled Jack. "Nor yet for my money."

"Out of esteem?" suggested Sarella.

"Can't say, I'm sure. I never heerd her mention it. Anyway, it didn't last – "

"The esteem?"

"No. The firm. She died – when Ginger was born. Since which I have remained a bachelord."

"By Ginger you mean your daughter?"

"That's what they called her. Her aunt took her, and *she* took the smallpox. But she didn't die of it. She's alive now."

"Married, I daresay?"

"No. Single. She's as like me as you're not," Jack explained summarily.

Sarella laughed.

"A good girl, though, I'll be bound," she hinted amiably.

"She's never mentioned the contrary – in her letters."

"Oh, she writes! I'm glad she writes."

"Thank you, Miss Sarella. She writes most Christmasses. And she wrote lately, tho' it's not Christmas."

"Not ill, I hope?"

"Ill! She's an industrious girl with plenty o' sense ... but her aunt's dead, and she thinks o' taking a place in a boarding-house."

"Jack," said Sarella, after a brief but pregnant pause of consideration, "bring her up here."

Jack regarded her with a stare of undisguised amazement.

"Why not?" Sarella persisted. "It would be better for you."

"What's that to do with it?"

"And better for Miss Mariquita. It's too much for Miss Mariquita – all the work she has to do."

"That's true anyway."

"Of course it's true. Anyone can see that." (That Sarella saw it, considerably surprised Jack, and provided matter for some close consideration subsequently.)

"Look here, Jack," she went on, "I'll tell you what. You go to Mr. Xeres and say you'd like your daughter to come and work for you..."

"And he'd tell me to go and be damned."

"But you'd not go. And he wouldn't want you to go. And *I'll* speak to him."

Jack stared again. He hardly realized yet how much steadily growing confidence in her influence with "the Boss" Sarella felt. He made no promise to speak to him: but said "he'd sleep on it."

With that sleep came a certain ray of comprehension. Miss Sarella was not thinking entirely of him and his loneliness, nor entirely of Miss Mariquita. He believed that she really expected the Boss would marry her (as all the cowboys had believed for some weeks) and he perceived, with some involuntary admiration of her shrewdness, that she had no idea of being left, if Miss Mariquita should marry and go away, to do all the work as she had done. Once arrived at this perception of the situation,

Jack went ahead confident of Sarella's quietly persistent help. He had not the least dread of rough language. He had no sensitive dread of displeasing his master. He would like to have Ginger up at the range especially as Ginger's coming would take much of the work off Miss Mariquita's hands. He even made Don Joaquin suspect that if Ginger were not allowed to come he, Jack, would go, and make a home for her down in Maxwell.

It did not suit Don Joaquin to lose Jack, and it suited him very well to listen to Sarella.

So Ginger came, and proved, as all the cowboys agreed, a good sort, though quite as ugly as her father.

CHAPTER VIII

"Mariquita," said her father one day, "does Sarella ever talk to you about religion?"

Anything like what could be called a conversation was so rare between them that the girl was surprised, and it surprised her still more that he should choose that particular subject.

"She asked me if we were Catholics."

"Of course we are Catholics. You said so?"

"I didn't say 'of course,' but I said we were. She then asked if my mother had become one – on her marriage or afterwards."

Don Joaquin heard this with evident interest, and, as Mariquita thought, with some satisfaction.

"What did you say?" he inquired.

Mariquita glanced at him as if puzzled. "I told her that my mother never became a Catholic," she answered.

"That pleased her?"

"I don't know. She did not seem pleased or displeased."

"She did not seem glad that I had not insisted that my wife should be Catholic?"

"She may have been glad – I did not see that she was."

"You did not think she would have been angry if she had heard I had insisted that my wife should be Catholic?"

"No; that did not appear to me."

So far as Mariquita's information went, it satisfied her father. Only it was a pity Sarella should know that her aunt had not adopted his own religion.

Mariquita had not probed the motive of his questions. Direct enough of *impression*, she was not penetrating nor astute in following the hidden working of other persons' minds.

"It is," he remarked, "a good thing Sarella came here."

"Poor thing! She had no home left – it was natural she should think of coming to her aunt."

"Yes, quite natural. And good for you also."

"I was not lonely before – "

"But if I had died?"

Mariquita had never thought of his dying; he was as strong as a tree, and she could not picture the range without him.

"I never thought of you dying. You are not old, father."

"Old, no! But suppose I had died, all the same – before Sarella came – what would you have done?"

"I never thought of it."

"No. That would have been out of place. But you could not have lived here, one girl all alone among all the men."

"No, of course."

"Now you have Sarella. It would be different."

"Oh, yes; if she wished to go on living here – "

"If she went away to live somewhere else you could go with her."

Mariquita did not see that that would be necessary, but she did not say so. She was not aware that her father was endeavoring to habituate her mind to the permanence of Sarella's connection with herself.

"Of course," he said casually, "you might marry – at any time."

"I never thought of that," the girl answered, and he saw clearly that she never *had* thought of it. Gore would, he perceived, not have her for the asking; might have a great deal of asking to do, and might not succeed after much asking.

It was not so clear to him that Gore himself was as well aware of that as he was.

That she had never had any thoughts of marriage pleased him, partly because he would not have liked Gore to get what he wanted, so easily, and partly because it satisfied his notion of dignity in her – his daughter. It was really his own dignity in her he was thinking of.

All the same, now that he knew she was not thinking of marrying the handsome stranger, he felt more clearly that (if Gore's "conditions" were suitable) the marriage might suit him – Don Joaquin.

"There are," he observed sententiously, "only two ways for women."

"Two ways?"

"Marriage is the usual way. If God had wanted only nuns, He would have created women only. That one sees. Whereas there are women and men – so marriage is the ordinary way for women; and if God chooses there should be more married women than nuns, it shows He doesn't want too many nuns."

The argument was new to Mariquita: she was little used to hear *any* abstract discussion from her father.

"You have thought of it," she said; "I have never thought of all that."

"There was no necessity. It might have been out of place. All the same it is true what I say."

"But I think it is also true that to be a nun is the best way for some women."

"Naturally. For some."

Mariquita had no sort of desire to argue with him, or anyone; arguments were, she thought, almost quarrels.

He, on his side, was again thinking of Sarella, and left the nuns alone.

"It would," he said, "be a good thing if Sarella should become Catholic. If she talks about religion you can explain to her that there can be only one that is true."

Mariquita did not understand (though everyone else did) that her father wished to marry Sarella, and, of course, she could not know that he was resolved against provoking further punishment by marrying a Protestant.

"If I can," she said, slowly, "I will try to help her to see that. She does not talk much about such things. And she is much older than I am –"

"Oh, yes; quite very much older," he agreed earnestly, though in fact Sarella appeared simply a girl to him.

"And it would not do good for me to seem interfering."

"But," he agreed with some adroitness, "though a blind person were older than you (who can see) you would show her the way?"

Mariquita was not, at any rate, so blind as to be unable to see that her father was strongly desirous that Sarella should be a Catholic. It had surprised her, as she had no recollection of his having troubled himself concerning her own mother, his beloved wife, not having been one. Of course, she was glad, thinking it meant a deeper interest in religion on his own part.

CHAPTER IX

Between Mariquita and her father there was little in common except a partial community of race; in nature and character they were entirely different. In her the Indian strain had only physical expression, and that only in the slim suppleness of her frame; she would never grow stout as do so many Spanish women.

Whereas in her father the Indian blood had effects of character. He was not merely subtle like a Latin, but had besides the craft and cunning of an Indian. Yet the cunning seemed only an intensification of the subtlety, a deeper degree of the same quality and not an added separate quality. In fact, in him, as in many with the same mixture of race, the Indian strain and the Spanish were really mingled, not merely joined in one individual.

Mariquita had, after all, only one quarter Spanish, and one Indian; whereas with him it was a quarter of half and half. She had, in actual blood, a whole half that was pure Saxon, for her mother's New England family was of pure English descent. Yet Mariquita seemed far more purely Spanish than her father; he himself could trace nothing of her mother in her, and in her character was nothing Indian but her patience.

From her mother personally she inherited nothing, but through her mother she had certain characteristics that helped to make her very incomprehensible to Don Joaquin, though he did not know it.

Gore, who studied her with far more care and interest, because to him she seemed deeply worth study, did not himself feel compelled to remember her triple strain of race. For to him she seemed splendidly, adorably simple. He was far from falling into Sarella's shallow mistake of calling that simplicity "stupidity"; to him it appeared a sublimation of purity, rarely noble and fine. That she was book-ignorant he knew, as well as that she was life-ignorant; but he did not think her intellectually narrow, even intellectually fallow. Along what roads her mind moved he could not, by mere study of her, discover; yet he was sure it did not stagnate without motion or life.

About a month after the arrival of Sarella, one Saturday night at supper, that young person observed that Mr. Gore's place was vacant.

Mariquita must equally have noted the fact, but she had said nothing.

"Isn't Mr. Gore coming to his supper?" Sarella asked her.

Don Joaquin thought this out of place. His daughter's silence on the subject had pleased him better.

"I don't know," Mariquita answered, glancing towards her father.

"No," he said; "he has ridden down to Maxwell."

Sometimes one or other of the cowboys would ride down to Maxwell, and reappear, without question or remark.

"I wonder he did not mention he was going," Sarella complained.

"Of course he mentioned it," Don Joaquin said loudly. "He would not go without asking me."

"But to us ladies," Sarella persisted, "it would have been better manners."

"That was not at all necessary," said Don Joaquin; "Mariquita would not expect it."

"I would, though. It ought to have struck him that one might have a communication for him. I should have had commissions for him."

It was evident that Sarella had ruffled Don Joaquin, and it was the first time anyone had seen him annoyed by her.

Next day, after the midday meal, Sarella followed Mariquita out of doors, and said to her, yawning and laughing.

"Don't you miss Mr. Gore?"

Mariquita answered at once and quite simply:

"Miss him? He was never here till a month ago – "

"Nor was I," Sarella interrupted pouting prettily. "But you'd miss me, now."

"Only you're not going away."

"You take it for granted I shall stop, then?" (And Sarella looked complacent.) "That I'm a fixture."

"I never thought of your going away," Mariquita answered, with a formula rather habitual to her. "Where would you go?"

"I should decide on that when I decided to go." Sarella declared oracularly. But Mariquita took it with irritating calmness.

"I don't believe you will decide to go," she said with that gravity and plainness of hers that often irritated Sarella – who liked *badinage*. "It would be useless."

"Suppose," Sarella suggested, pinching the younger girl's arm playfully, "suppose I were to think of getting married. Shouldn't I have to go then?"

"I never thought of that – " Mariquita was beginning, but Sarella pinched and interrupted her.

"Do you *ever* think of anything?" she complained sharply.

"Oh, yes, often, of many things."

"What things on earth?" (with sudden inquisitive eagerness.)

"Just my own sort of things," Mariquita answered, without saying whether "her things" were on earth at all. Sarella pouted again.

"You're not very confidential to a person."

Mariquita weighed the accusation. "Perhaps," she said quietly, "I am not much used to persons. Since I came home from the convent there was no other girl here till you came."

"So you're sorry I came!"

"No; glad. I am glad you did that. It is a home for you. And I am sure my father is glad."

"You think he likes my being here?" And Sarella listened attentively for the answer.

"Of course. You must see it."

"You think he does not dislike me? He was cross with me last night."

"He did not like you noticing Mr. Gore was away – "

"Of course I noticed it – surely, he could not be jealous of that!"

"I should not think he could be jealous," Mariquita agreed, too readily to please Sarella. "But I did not think of it. I am sure he does not dislike you. You cannot think he does."

Sarella was far from thinking it. But she had wanted Mariquita to say more, and was only partly satisfied.

"*He* would not like me to go away?" she suggested.

"Oh, no. The contrary."

"Not even if it were advantageous to me?"

"How advantageous?"

"If I were to be going to a home of my own? Going, for instance, to be married?"

"That would surprise him..."

Sarella was not pleased at this.

"Surprise him! Why should it surprise him that anyone should marry me?"

"There is no reason. Only, he does not imagine that there *is* someone. If there is someone, he would suppose you had not been willing to marry him by your coming here instead."

("Is she stupid or cautious?" Sarella asked herself. "She will say nothing.")

Mariquita was neither cautious nor stupid. She was only ignorant of Sarella's purpose, and by no means awake to her father's.

"It is terribly hot out here," Sarella grumbled, "and there is such a glare. I shall go in and study."

CHAPTER X

Mariquita did not go in too. She did not find it hot, nor did the glare trouble her. The air was full of life and vigor, and she had no sense of lassitude. There was, indeed, a breeze from the far-off Rockies, and to her it seemed cool enough, though the sun was so nearly directly overhead that her figure cast only a very stunted shadow of herself. In the long grass the breeze made a slight rustle, but there was no other sound.

Mariquita did not want to be indoors; outside, here on the tilted prairie, she was alone and not lonely. The tilt of the vast space around her showed chiefly in this – that eastward the horizon was visibly lower than at the western rim of the prairie. The prairie was not really flat; between her and both horizons there lay undulations, those between her and the western rising into *mesas*, which, with a haze so light as only to tell in the great distance, hid the distant barrier of the Rocky Mountains, whose foothills even were beyond the frontiers of this State.

She knew well where they were, though, and knew almost exactly beyond which point of the far horizon lay Loretto Heights, beyond Denver, and the Convent.

Somehow the coming of these two new units to the range-life had pushed the Convent farther away still. But Mariquita's thoughts never rested in the mere memories hanging like a slowly fading arras around that long-concluded convent life. What it had given her was more than the memories and was hers still.

As to the mere memories, she knew that with slow but increasing pace they were receding from her, till on time's horizon they would end in a haze, golden but vague and formless. Voices once clearly recalled were losing tone; faces, whose features had once risen before the eye of memory with little less distinctness than that with which she had seen them when physically present, arose now blurred like faces passing a fog. Even their individuality, depending less on feature than expression, was no longer easily recoverable.

She had been used to remember this and that nun by her very footsteps; now the nuns moved, a mere group in one costume, soundlessly, with no footstep at all.

Of this gradual loss of what had been almost her only private possession she made no inward wishful complaint; Mariquita was not morbid, nor melancholy. The operation of a natural law of life could not fill her with the poet's rebellious outcry. To all law indeed she yielded without protest, whether it implied submission without inward revolt to the mere shackles of circumstance, or submission to her father's dominance; for it was not in her fashion of mind to form hypothesis – such hypothesis, for instance, as that of her father calling upon her to take some course opposed to conscience. Though her gaze was turned towards the point of the horizon under which the Convent and its intimates were, it was not simply to dream of them that she yielded herself.

All that life had had a centre – not for herself only, but for all there. The simplicity of the life consisted, above all, in the simplicity of its object. Its routine, almost mechanically regular, was not mechanical because of its central meaning. No doubt the "work" of the nuns was education, but their work of education was service of a Master. And the Master was Himself the real object, the centre of the work, as carried on within those quiet, busy walls. Mariquita no longer formed a part, though the work was still operative in her, and had not ceased with her removal from the workers; but she was as near as ever to its centre, and was now more concerned with the ultimate object of the work than with the work.

Her memories were weakening in color and definiteness, but her possession was not decreased, her possession was the Master who possessed herself.

The simplicity that Gore had from the first noted in her, without being able to inform himself wherein it consisted – but which he venerated without knowing its source, that he knew was noble – was first that Mariquita did in fact live and move and have her being, as nominally all His creatures

do, in the Master of that vanished convent life. What the prairie was to her body, surrounding it, its sole background and scene and stage of action, He was to her inward, very vivid, wholly silent life; what the prairie was to her healthy lungs, He was to her soul, its breath, "inspiration." Banal and stale as such metaphor is, in her the two lives were so unified (in this was the rarity of her "simplicity") that it was at least completely accurate.

With Mariquita that which we call the supernatural life was not occasional and spasmodic. That inspiration of Our Lord was not, as with so many, a gulp, or periodic series of gulps, but a breathing as steady and soundless as the natural breathing of her strong, sane, flawless body.

She did not, like the self-conscious pietist, listen to it. She did not, like the pathological pietist, test its pulse or temperature. The pathological pietist is still self-student, though studious of self in a new relation; still breathes her own breath at second-hand, and remains indoors within the four walls of herself.

Of herself Mariquita knew little. That God had given her, in truth, existence; that she knew. That *she* was, because He chose. That He had been born, and died, and lived again, for her sake, as much as for the sake of any one of all the saints, though not more than for the sake of the human being in all the world who thought least of Him: that she knew. That He loved her incomparably better than she could love herself or any other person – that she knew with a reality of knowledge greater than that with which any lover ever knows himself beloved by the lover who would give and lose everything for him. That He had already set in her another treasure, the capacity of loving Him – that also she knew with ineffable reverence and gladness, and that the power of loving Him grew in her, as the power of knowing Him grew.

But concerning herself Mariquita knew little except such things as these. She had studied neither her own capacities nor her own limitations, neither her tastes, nor her gifts. That Sarella thought her stupid, she was hardly aware, and less than half aware that Sarella was wrong. No human creature had ever told her that she was beautiful, and she had never made any guess on the subject with herself. She never wondered if she were happy, or ever unjustly disinherited of the means of happiness. Whether, in less strait thrall of circumstance, she might be of more consequence, even of more use, she never debated. She had not dreamed of being heroic; had no chafing at absence of either sphere or capacity for being brilliant. Her life was passing in a silence singularly profound among the lives of God's other human creatures, and its silence, unhumanness, oblivion (that deepest of oblivion lying beneath what *has* been known though forgotten) did not vex her, and was never thought of. Her duties were coarse and common; but they were those God had set in her way and sight, and she had no impatience of them, no scorn for them, but just did them. They were not more coarse or common than those He had himself found to His hand, and done, in the house at Nazareth where Joseph was master, and, after Joseph, Mary was mistress, and He, their Creator, third, to obey and serve them.

It would be greatly unjust to Mariquita to say that the monotone of her life was made golden by the bright haze in which it moved. She lived not in a dream, but in an atmosphere. She was not a dreamy person, moving through realities without consciousness of them. She saw all around her, with living interest, only she saw beyond them with interest deeper still, or rather their own significance for her was made deeper by her sense of what was beyond them, and to which they, like herself, belonged. She was very conscious of her neighbors, not only of the human neighbors, but also of the live creatures not human; and each of these had, in her reverence, a definite sacredness as coming like herself from the hand of God.

There was nothing pantheistic in this; seeing everything as God's she did not see it itself Divine, but every natural object was to her clear vision but a thread in the clear, transparent veil through which God showed Himself everywhere. When St. Francis "preached to the birds" he was in fact listening to their sermon to him; and Mariquita, in her close neighborly friendship with the small wild creatures of the prairie, was only worshipping the ineffable, kind friendliness of God, who had made, and who fed, them also. The love she gave them was only one of the myriad silent expressions of her love for

Him, who loved them. They were easier and simpler to understand than her human neighbors. It was not that, for an instant, she thought them on the same plane of interest – but we must here interrupt ourselves as she was interrupted.

CHAPTER XI

Mariquita had been alone a long time when Gore, riding home, came suddenly upon her.

She was sitting where a clump of trees cast now a shadow, and it was only in coming round them that he saw her when already very near her. The ground was soft there, and his horse's hoofs had made scarcely any sound.

She turned her head, and he saluted her, at the same moment slipping from the saddle.

"I thought you were far away," she said.

"I have been far away – at Maxwell. It has been a long ride."

"Yes, that is a long way," she said. "But I never go there."

"No? I went to hear Mass."

She was surprised, never having thought that he was a Catholic.

"I did not know you were a Catholic," she told him.

"No wonder! I have been here a month and never been to Mass before."

"It is so far. I never go."

"You *are* a Catholic, then?"

"Oh, yes; I think all Spaniards are Catholics."

"But not all Americans," Gore suggested smiling.

"No. And of course, we are Americans, my father and I."

"Exactly. No doubt I knew your names, both surname and Christian name, were Spanish, and I supposed you were of Catholic descent –"

"Only," she interrupted with a quiet matter-of-factness, "you saw we never went to Mass."

"Perhaps a priest comes here sometimes and gives you Mass."

"No, never. If it were not so very far, I suppose my father would let me ride down to Maxwell occasionally, at all events. But he would not let me go alone, and none of the men are Catholics; besides, he would not wish me to go with one of them; and then it would be necessary to go down on Saturday and sleep there. Of course, he would not permit that. But," and she did not smile as she said this, "it must seem strange to you, who are a Catholic, to think that I, who am one also, should never hear Mass. Since I left the Convent and came home I do not hear it. That may scandalize you."

"I shall never be scandalized by you," he answered, also without smiling.

"That is best," she said. "It is generally foolish to be scandalized, because we can know so little about each other's case."

She paused a moment, and he thought how little need she could ever have of any charitable suspension of judgment. He knew well enough by instinct, that this inability to hear Mass must be the great disinheritance of her life here on the prairie, her submission to it, her great obedience.

"But," she went on earnestly, "I hope you will not take any scandal at my father either – from my saying that he would not permit my going down to Maxwell and staying there all night on Saturday so as to hear Mass on Sunday morning. (There is, you know, only one Mass there, and that very early, because the priest has to go far into the county on the other side of Maxwell to give another Mass.) We know no family down there with whom I could stay. He would think it impossible I should stay with strange people – or in an hotel. Our Spanish ideas would forbid that."

"Oh, yes; I can fully understand. You need not fear my being so stupid as to take scandal. I have all my life had enough to do being scandalized at myself."

"Ah, yes! That is so. One finds that always. Only one knows that God is more indulgent to one's faults than one has learned to be oneself; that patience comes so very slowly, and slower still the humility that would teach one to be never surprised at any fault in oneself."

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