



# *The White Parrot*

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Spanish

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*Intermediate*

*11 min read*

Once upon a time in a city in Spain, a brother and sister lived with their father in a happy little home. They were especially proud of their inner courtyard which was full of rare plants. The mother was dead, and little Mariquita was mistress of the house. She was a splendid little housekeeper, and everything about the place was always bright and shining.

One day an old woman came to the door when Mariquita was at home alone. She knocked, and Mariquita ran to open the door.

“How do you do, little girl? Is your father at home?” asked the old woman.

Mariquita replied that he was away.

“Is your brother at home?” asked the old woman.

Mariquita replied that he too was away from home that day.

“What a pretty home you have!” said the old woman. “It is quite the most attractive place in the town.”

Mariquita threw wide the door. "Come in and our house," she said. "I love to show visitors about. I want you to see what a pretty courtyard we have."

The old woman admired everything about the house. When she saw the patio she said that it too was very attractive. There was only one thing that was lacking. It needed a fountain of silver water.

"I never saw a fountain of silver water," said little Mariquita. "I'd like to have one, but I don't know where I could get one."

"That is easy," said the old woman. "All you have to do is to go to a certain place with a little jar and bring home the jar full of water from the fountain you will find there. When you put it in the courtyard, it will instantly become a fountain of silver water. I'll tell you exactly where to go to get it."

When Mariquita's father and brother came home they found her crying. "What is the matter?" they asked in alarm. She was such a happy little maid that they were not in the habit of seeing tears upon her cheeks.

"I want a fountain of silver water for our patio," cried Mariquita. "I'll never be happy again until I have one!"

"What nonsense!" cried her brother.

"We do not need a fountain of silver water in our patio. It is pretty enough as it is," said the father, shaking his head.

"I know just where to go to get water to make one!" cried Mariquita. "It is the easiest thing in the world to get it! I'll never be happy until I have it!"

She kept on crying until at last her brother decided to go in search of the water for her. He took a jar with him.

When he had gone a long distance he encountered a little old man, standing in the middle of the road.

"Where are you going, my lad?" asked the little old man. "Who hates you so much as to send you into these parts?"

"I am in search of a fountain of silver water for our patio at home," replied the boy. "An old woman told my

sister about it, and now my sister will never be happy again until she has one.”

“There is great danger in getting this water,” said the little old man thoughtfully. ” You appear however to be a wise lad and perhaps will succeed. The fountain where you are going is guarded by a fierce lion. If he has his eyes closed he can see you, but if his eyes are open wide he is fast asleep. Wait carefully until you are sure his eyes are open. Then fill your jar with water and run away as fast as you can.”



“He waited until the lion’s eyes were open.” Illustration by Maud and Miska Petersham, published in *Tales of Enchantment from Spain* by Elsie Spicer Eells (1920), Harcourt, Brace and Company.

The lad did exactly as the little old man told him, and waited until the lion’s eyes were wide open. Then he filled his water jar and hurried home with it as fast as possible.

When he emptied the jar of water in the patio, at once it changed into a lovely little fountain of silver water. Mariquita clapped her hands in joy, and even her father admitted that it was a great ornament to the patio.

“Oh, I am so happy!” cried Mariquita. “The fountain of silver water is the loveliest thing I have ever seen!” The next day, when her father and brother were away, the old woman came again to the door.

“I am so glad you have come!” cried Mariquita as she opened the door. “I want you to see what I have in my patio.”

She led the old woman into the courtyard and showed her the fountain of silver water.

“It is a great improvement,” said the old woman, “but there is something else which you need. Now you should have a little tree with leaves of silver and nuts of gold, growing beside the fountain.”

“Tell me where I can get one!” cried Mariquita eagerly. “I never saw a tree with leaves of silver and nuts of gold. It must be beautiful!”

When her father and brother came home that night she told them about her visit from the old woman. There was no peace in the house until her brother had promised to start the next morning in search of the tree with leaves of silver and nuts of gold.

He started early upon his journey, and after he had gone a long distance, he saw the same little old man standing in his path. He told the old man about this new quest.

“Take a horse, my lad. You’ll need one, and I have one here waiting. Follow the narrow path which leads up the mountain into the forest. After you have gone for some distance in the forest you will see the tree you seek. It is guarded by a serpent, and when the serpent’s head is hidden it is asleep. Wait until it is asleep, and then break

off a branch from the tree. Take it home and plant it in your courtyard, and you'll soon have a tree with silver leaves and nuts of gold, just as your sister wishes."

The boy mounted the horse and followed the directions which the little old man had given him. When the serpent's head was hidden, he broke off a branch from the tree and took it home. As soon as the branch was planted in the courtyard, it grew into a lovely little tree with leaves of silver and nuts of gold.

"Oh, I am the happiest girl in the world!" cried Mariquita, when she saw it growing there beside the fountain of silver water.

All went well for many days. Then the old woman came again and knocked at the door.

"Come in and see what I have in my patio now!" cried Mariquita, opening the door.

The old woman went into the patio. "All you are lacking now is a white parrot," she said, as she looked about. When Mariquita's father and brother came home that night, they found Mariquita once more in tears. There was no peace in the house until her brother promised to get her a white parrot.

When the lad had gone for some distance on his way, he again met the little old man. He told him about the white parrot which his sister had sent him to procure for her.

"Perhaps you will be able to get this white parrot for your sister," said the little old man, "but it is a very dangerous undertaking. You will travel on and on until you come to a lovely garden, the most beautiful garden you have ever seen. You will see many wonderful birds flying about among the trees in the garden, but do not pay any attention to them. Wait a little, and you will see a white parrot, an exceedingly beautiful parrot, come and seat itself upon the round stone in the middle of the garden. It will turn slowly around, and after a while it will put its head under its wing and go to sleep. Wait until its head is under its wing and it is sound asleep before you seize it. Otherwise you will be turned into stone."

The boy followed the directions and came to a beautiful garden full of many trees with wonderful birds flying about the branches. He waited until a white parrot came flying down out of the treetops, alighting on the round stone in the center of the garden. It was the most beautiful bird he had ever seen, far lovelier than he had expected. The white parrot turned slowly round and round upon the stone, and finally it put its head under its

wing. In his eagerness to obtain the beautiful bird the lad forgot to be sufficiently cautious. He seized the bird a moment too soon and was turned into stone.

Mariquita awaited her brother's return anxiously. As the days and weeks passed by and he did not come, her grief knew no bounds.

"Some evil has befallen my brother!" she cried over and over again. "It is all my fault! It was my foolish wish for a white parrot which sent him away from our happy home. Oh, why was I so foolish as to listen to the old woman?"

At last Mariquita could endure her anxiety no longer and she decided to go in search of her brother. As she went on her way she encountered a little old man in her path.

"Have you seen a lad pass by some weeks ago, a handsome lad with deep, dark eyes and waving dark hair upon his brow?" Mariquita asked eagerly. "I am sure you would remember him if once you saw him."

The little old man replied that he knew her brother well. Then he told her of the dangers which attended the quest of the white parrot.

"I know my brother has been turned into stone!" cried Mariquita. "What shall I do? It was all my fault! It was I who sent him in search of the white parrot! Oh, why did I ever listen to the old woman who came to my door?"

"Be careful that you do not meet the same fate as your brother," said the little old man. "Now that you have gone so far on the way there is no turning back. All will be well if you do not try to seize the bird too soon."

Mariquita journeyed on and on until finally she came to the beautiful garden. She waited quietly until she saw the wonderful white parrot come flying down to the round stone in the middle of the garden. Slowly it turned around upon the stone. Then it tucked its lovely head under its snowy wing and went to sleep. The moment Mariquita stretched out her hand and seized the white parrot all the stones in the garden came to life. There was her brother standing close behind her. Her joy was unspeakable.

Mariquita and her brother invited all the stones which had been restored to human form to come home with them and celebrate the event in their house. A great feast was held which lasted for three days.

“Now that I have my own dear brother safe home again I am the happiest girl in the world! There is nothing more to wish for!” said Mariquita. “Never again will I give way to foolish longings.”

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