

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 1,
PART 10

Miguel Cervantes
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Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

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CHAPTER XXVIII. WHICH TREATS OF THE STRANGE AND DELIGHTFUL ADVENTURE THAT BEFELL THE CURATE AND THE BARBER IN THE SAME SIERRA

Happy and fortunate were the times when that most daring knight Don Quixote of La Mancha was sent into the world; for by reason of his having formed a resolution so honourable as that of seeking to revive and restore to the world the long-lost and almost defunct order of knight-errantry, we now enjoy in this age of ours, so poor in light entertainment, not only the charm of his veracious history, but also of the tales and episodes contained in it which are, in a measure, no less pleasing, ingenious, and truthful, than the history itself; which, resuming

its thread, carded, spun, and wound, relates that just as the curate was going to offer consolation to Cardenio, he was interrupted by a voice that fell upon his ear saying in plaintive tones:

"O God! is it possible I have found a place that may serve as a secret grave for the weary load of this body that I support so unwillingly? If the solitude these mountains promise deceives me not, it is so; ah! woe is me! how much more grateful to my mind will be the society of these rocks and brakes that permit me to complain of my misfortune to Heaven, than that of any human being, for there is none on earth to look to for counsel in doubt, comfort in sorrow, or relief in distress!"

All this was heard distinctly by the curate and those with him, and as it seemed to them to be uttered close by, as indeed it was, they got up to look for the speaker, and before they had gone twenty paces they discovered behind a rock, seated at the foot of an ash tree, a youth in the dress of a peasant, whose face they were unable at the moment to see as he was leaning forward, bathing his feet in the brook that flowed past. They approached so silently that he did not perceive them, being fully occupied in bathing his feet, which were so fair that they looked like two pieces of shining crystal brought forth among the other stones of the brook. The whiteness and beauty of these feet struck them with surprise, for they did not seem to have been made to crush clods or to follow the plough and the oxen as their owner's dress suggested; and so, finding they had not been noticed, the curate, who was in front, made a sign to the other two to conceal

themselves behind some fragments of rock that lay there; which they did, observing closely what the youth was about. He had on a loose double-skirted dark brown jacket bound tight to his body with a white cloth; he wore besides breeches and gaiters of brown cloth, and on his head a brown montera; and he had the gaiters turned up as far as the middle of the leg, which verily seemed to be of pure alabaster.

As soon as he had done bathing his beautiful feet, he wiped them with a towel he took from under the montera, on taking off which he raised his face, and those who were watching him had an opportunity of seeing a beauty so exquisite that Cardenio said to the curate in a whisper:

"As this is not Luscinda, it is no human creature but a divine being."

The youth then took off the montera, and shaking his head from side to side there broke loose and spread out a mass of hair that the beams of the sun might have envied; by this they knew that what had seemed a peasant was a lovely woman, nay the most beautiful the eyes of two of them had ever beheld, or even Cardenio's if they had not seen and known Luscinda, for he afterwards declared that only the beauty of Luscinda could compare with this. The long auburn tresses not only covered her shoulders, but such was their length and abundance, concealed her all round beneath their masses, so that except the feet nothing of her form was visible. She now used her hands as a comb, and if her feet had seemed like bits of crystal in the water, her hands

looked like pieces of driven snow among her locks; all which increased not only the admiration of the three beholders, but their anxiety to learn who she was. With this object they resolved to show themselves, and at the stir they made in getting upon their feet the fair damsel raised her head, and parting her hair from before her eyes with both hands, she looked to see who had made the noise, and the instant she perceived them she started to her feet, and without waiting to put on her shoes or gather up her hair, hastily snatched up a bundle as though of clothes that she had beside her, and, scared and alarmed, endeavoured to take flight; but before she had gone six paces she fell to the ground, her delicate feet being unable to bear the roughness of the stones; seeing which, the three hastened towards her, and the curate addressing her first said:

"Stay, senora, whoever you may be, for those whom you see here only desire to be of service to you; you have no need to attempt a flight so heedless, for neither can your feet bear it, nor we allow it."

Taken by surprise and bewildered, she made no reply to these words. They, however, came towards her, and the curate taking her hand went on to say:

"What your dress would hide, senora, is made known to us by your hair; a clear proof that it can be no trifling cause that has disguised your beauty in a garb so unworthy of it, and sent it into solitudes like these where we have had the good fortune to find you, if not to relieve your distress, at least to offer you

comfort; for no distress, so long as life lasts, can be so oppressive or reach such a height as to make the sufferer refuse to listen to comfort offered with good intention. And so, senora, or senor, or whatever you prefer to be, dismiss the fears that our appearance has caused you and make us acquainted with your good or evil fortunes, for from all of us together, or from each one of us, you will receive sympathy in your trouble."

While the curate was speaking, the disguised damsel stood as if spell-bound, looking at them without opening her lips or uttering a word, just like a village rustic to whom something strange that he has never seen before has been suddenly shown; but on the curate addressing some further words to the same effect to her, sighing deeply she broke silence and said:

"Since the solitude of these mountains has been unable to conceal me, and the escape of my dishevelled tresses will not allow my tongue to deal in falsehoods, it would be idle for me now to make any further pretence of what, if you were to believe me, you would believe more out of courtesy than for any other reason. This being so, I say I thank you, sirs, for the offer you have made me, which places me under the obligation of complying with the request you have made of me; though I fear the account I shall give you of my misfortunes will excite in you as much concern as compassion, for you will be unable to suggest anything to remedy them or any consolation to alleviate them. However, that my honour may not be left a matter of doubt in your minds, now that you have discovered me to be a woman, and see that

I am young, alone, and in this dress, things that taken together or separately would be enough to destroy any good name, I feel bound to tell what I would willingly keep secret if I could."

All this she who was now seen to be a lovely woman delivered without any hesitation, with so much ease and in so sweet a voice that they were not less charmed by her intelligence than by her beauty, and as they again repeated their offers and entreaties to her to fulfil her promise, she without further pressing, first modestly covering her feet and gathering up her hair, seated herself on a stone with the three placed around her, and, after an effort to restrain some tears that came to her eyes, in a clear and steady voice began her story thus:

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