

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 2,
PART 32

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Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

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CHAPTER XLVI. OF THE TERRIBLE BELL AND CAT FRIGHT THAT DON QUIXOTE GOT IN THE COURSE OF THE ENAMOURED ALTISIDORA'S WOOING

We left Don Quixote wrapped up in the reflections which the music of the enamoured maid Altisidora had given rise to. He went to bed with them, and just like fleas they would not let him sleep or get a moment's rest, and the broken stitches of his stockings helped them. But as Time is fleet and no obstacle can stay his course, he came riding on the hours, and morning very soon arrived. Seeing which Don Quixote quitted the soft down, and, nowise slothful, dressed himself in his chamois suit and put on his travelling boots to hide the disaster to his stockings. He

threw over him his scarlet mantle, put on his head a montera of green velvet trimmed with silver edging, flung across his shoulder the baldric with his good trenchant sword, took up a large rosary that he always carried with him, and with great solemnity and precision of gait proceeded to the antechamber where the duke and duchess were already dressed and waiting for him. But as he passed through a gallery, Altisidora and the other damsel, her friend, were lying in wait for him, and the instant Altisidora saw him she pretended to faint, while her friend caught her in her lap, and began hastily unlacing the bosom of her dress.

Don Quixote observed it, and approaching them said, "I know very well what this seizure arises from."

"I know not from what," replied the friend, "for Altisidora is the healthiest damsel in all this house, and I have never heard her complain all the time I have known her. A plague on all the knights-errant in the world, if they be all ungrateful! Go away, Senor Don Quixote; for this poor child will not come to herself again so long as you are here."

To which Don Quixote returned, "Do me the favour, senora, to let a lute be placed in my chamber to-night; and I will comfort this poor maiden to the best of my power; for in the early stages of love a prompt disillusion is an approved remedy;" and with this he retired, so as not to be remarked by any who might see him there.

He had scarcely withdrawn when Altisidora, recovering from her swoon, said to her companion, "The lute must be left, for no

doubt Don Quixote intends to give us some music; and being his it will not be bad."

They went at once to inform the duchess of what was going on, and of the lute Don Quixote asked for, and she, delighted beyond measure, plotted with the duke and her two damsels to play him a trick that should be amusing but harmless; and in high glee they waited for night, which came quickly as the day had come; and as for the day, the duke and duchess spent it in charming conversation with Don Quixote.

When eleven o'clock came, Don Quixote found a guitar in his chamber; he tried it, opened the window, and perceived that some persons were walking in the garden; and having passed his fingers over the frets of the guitar and tuned it as well as he could, he spat and cleared his chest, and then with a voice a little hoarse but full-toned, he sang the following ballad, which he had himself that day composed:

Mighty Love the hearts of maidens
Doth unsettle and perplex,
And the instrument he uses
Most of all is idleness.

Sewing, stitching, any labour,
Having always work to do,
To the poison Love instilleth
Is the antidote most sure.

And to proper-minded maidens
Who desire the matron's name
Modesty's a marriage portion,
Modesty their highest praise.

Men of prudence and discretion,
Courtiers gay and gallant knights,
With the wanton damsels dally,
But the modest take to wife.

There are passions, transient, fleeting,
Loves in hostelries declar'd,
Sunrise loves, with sunset ended,
When the guest hath gone his way.

Love that springs up swift and sudden,
Here to-day, to-morrow flown,
Passes, leaves no trace behind it,
Leaves no image on the soul.

Painting that is laid on painting
Maketh no display or show;
Where one beauty's in possession
There no other can take hold.

Dulcinea del Toboso
Painted on my heart I wear;
Never from its tablets, never,
Can her image be eras'd.

The quality of all in lovers
Most esteemed is constancy;
'T is by this that love works wonders,
This exalts them to the skies.

Don Quixote had got so far with his song, to which the duke, the duchess, Altisidora, and nearly the whole household of the castle were listening, when all of a sudden from a gallery above that was exactly over his window they let down a cord with more than a hundred bells attached to it, and immediately after that discharged a great sack full of cats, which also had bells of smaller size tied to their tails. Such was the din of the bells and the squalling of the cats, that though the duke and duchess were the contrivers of the joke they were startled by it, while Don Quixote stood paralysed with fear; and as luck would have it, two or three of the cats made their way in through the grating of his chamber, and flying from one side to the other, made it seem as if there was a legion of devils at large in it. They extinguished the candles that were burning in the room, and rushed about seeking some way of escape; the cord with the large bells never ceased rising and falling; and most of the people of the castle, not knowing what was really the matter, were at their wits' end with astonishment. Don Quixote sprang to his feet, and drawing his sword, began making passes at the grating, shouting out, "Avaunt, malignant enchanters! avaunt, ye witchcraft-working rabble! I am Don Quixote of La Mancha, against whom your evil

machinations avail not nor have any power." And turning upon the cats that were running about the room, he made several cuts at them. They dashed at the grating and escaped by it, save one that, finding itself hard pressed by the slashes of Don Quixote's sword, flew at his face and held on to his nose tooth and nail, with the pain of which he began to shout his loudest. The duke and duchess hearing this, and guessing what it was, ran with all haste to his room, and as the poor gentleman was striving with all his might to detach the cat from his face, they opened the door with a master-key and went in with lights and witnessed the unequal combat. The duke ran forward to part the combatants, but Don Quixote cried out aloud, "Let no one take him from me; leave me hand to hand with this demon, this wizard, this enchanter; I will teach him, I myself, who Don Quixote of La Mancha is." The cat, however, never minding these threats, snarled and held on; but at last the duke pulled it off and flung it out of the window. Don Quixote was left with a face as full of holes as a sieve and a nose not in very good condition, and greatly vexed that they did not let him finish the battle he had been so stoutly fighting with that villain of an enchanter. They sent for some oil of John's wort, and Altisidora herself with her own fair hands bandaged all the wounded parts; and as she did so she said to him in a low voice. "All these mishaps have befallen thee, hardhearted knight, for the sin of thy insensibility and obstinacy; and God grant thy squire Sancho may forget to whip himself, so that that dearly beloved Dulcinea of thine may never be released from her

enchantment, that thou mayest never come to her bed, at least while I who adore thee am alive."

To all this Don Quixote made no answer except to heave deep sighs, and then stretched himself on his bed, thanking the duke and duchess for their kindness, not because he stood in any fear of that bell-ringing rabble of enchanters in cat shape, but because he recognised their good intentions in coming to his rescue. The duke and duchess left him to repose and withdrew greatly grieved at the unfortunate result of the joke; as they never thought the adventure would have fallen so heavy on Don Quixote or cost him so dear, for it cost him five days of confinement to his bed, during which he had another adventure, pleasanter than the late one, which his chronicler will not relate just now in order that he may turn his attention to Sancho Panza, who was proceeding with great diligence and drollery in his government.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHEREIN IS CONTINUED THE ACCOUNT OF HOW SANCHO PANZA CONDUCTED HIMSELF IN HIS GOVERNMENT

The history says that from the justice court they carried Sancho to a sumptuous palace, where in a spacious chamber there was a table laid out with royal magnificence. The clarions sounded as Sancho entered the room, and four pages came forward to present him with water for his hands, which Sancho received with great dignity. The music ceased, and Sancho seated himself at the head of the table, for there was only that seat placed, and no more than one cover laid. A personage, who it appeared afterwards was a physician, placed himself standing by his side with a whalebone wand in his hand. They then lifted up a fine white cloth covering fruit and a great variety of dishes of different sorts; one who looked like a student said grace, and a page put a laced bib on Sancho, while another who played the part of head carver placed a dish of fruit before him. But hardly had he tasted a morsel when the man with the wand touched the plate with it, and they took it away from before him with the utmost celerity. The carver, however, brought him another dish,

and Sancho proceeded to try it; but before he could get at it, not to say taste it, already the wand had touched it and a page had carried it off with the same promptitude as the fruit. Sancho seeing this was puzzled, and looking from one to another asked if this dinner was to be eaten after the fashion of a jugglery trick.

To this he with the wand replied, "It is not to be eaten, senor governor, except as is usual and customary in other islands where there are governors. I, senor, am a physician, and I am paid a salary in this island to serve its governors as such, and I have a much greater regard for their health than for my own, studying day and night and making myself acquainted with the governor's constitution, in order to be able to cure him when he falls sick. The chief thing I have to do is to attend at his dinners and suppers and allow him to eat what appears to me to be fit for him, and keep from him what I think will do him harm and be injurious to his stomach; and therefore I ordered that plate of fruit to be removed as being too moist, and that other dish I ordered to be removed as being too hot and containing many spices that stimulate thirst; for he who drinks much kills and consumes the radical moisture wherein life consists."

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