

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 2,
PART 30

Мигель де Сервантес Сааведра

**The History of Don
Quixote, Volume 2, Part 30**

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Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

The History of Don Quixote, Volume 2, Part 30

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHEREIN IS RELATED THE STRANGE AND UNDREAMT-OF ADVENTURE OF THE DISTRESSED DUENNA, ALIAS THE COUNTESS TRIFALDI, TOGETHER WITH A LETTER WHICH SANCHO PANZA WROTE TO HIS WIFE, TERESA PANZA

The duke had a majordomo of a very facetious and sportive turn, and he it was that played the part of Merlin, made all the arrangements for the late adventure, composed the verses, and got a page to represent Dulcinea; and now, with the assistance of his master and mistress, he got up another of the drollest and strangest contrivances that can be imagined.

The duchess asked Sancho the next day if he had made a beginning with his penance task which he had to perform for the disenchantment of Dulcinea. He said he had, and had given himself five lashes overnight.

The duchess asked him what he had given them with.

He said with his hand.

"That," said the duchess, "is more like giving oneself slaps than lashes; I am sure the sage Merlin will not be satisfied with such tenderness; worthy Sancho must make a scourge with claws, or a cat-o'-nine tails, that will make itself felt; for it's with blood that letters enter, and the release of so great a lady as Dulcinea will not be granted so cheaply, or at such a paltry price; and remember, Sancho, that works of charity done in a lukewarm and half-hearted way are without merit and of no avail."

To which Sancho replied, "If your ladyship will give me a proper scourge or cord, I'll lay on with it, provided it does not hurt too much; for you must know, boor as I am, my flesh is more cotton than hemp, and it won't do for me to destroy myself for the good of anybody else."

"So be it by all means," said the duchess; "tomorrow I'll give you a scourge that will be just the thing for you, and will accommodate itself to the tenderness of your flesh, as if it was its own sister."

Then said Sancho, "Your highness must know, dear lady of my soul, that I have a letter written to my wife, Teresa Panza, giving her an account of all that has happened me since I left her; I have it here in my bosom, and there's nothing wanting but to put the address to it; I'd be glad if your discretion would read it, for I think it runs in the governor style; I mean the way governors ought to write."

"And who dictated it?" asked the duchess.

"Who should have dictated but myself, sinner as I am?" said Sancho.

"And did you write it yourself?" said the duchess.

"That I didn't," said Sancho; "for I can neither read nor write, though I can sign my name."

"Let us see it," said the duchess, "for never fear but you display in it the quality and quantity of your wit."

Sancho drew out an open letter from his bosom, and the duchess, taking it, found it ran in this fashion:

SANCHO PANZA'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE, TERESA PANZA

If I was well whipped I went mounted like a gentleman; if I have got a good government it is at the cost of a good whipping. Thou wilt not understand this just now, my Teresa; by-and-by thou wilt know what it means. I may tell thee, Teresa, I mean thee to go in a coach, for that is a matter of importance, because every other way of going is going on all-fours. Thou art a governor's wife; take care that nobody speaks evil of thee behind thy back. I send thee here a green hunting suit that my lady the duchess gave me; alter it so as to make a petticoat and bodice for our daughter. Don Quixote, my master, if I am to believe what I hear in these parts, is a madman of some sense, and a droll blockhead, and I am no way behind him. We have been in the cave of Montesinos, and the sage Merlin has laid hold of me for the disenchantment of Dulcinea del Toboso, her that is called Aldonza Lorenzo over there. With three thousand three hundred lashes, less five, that I'm to give myself, she will be left as entirely disenchanted as the mother that bore her. Say nothing of this to anyone; for, make thy affairs public, and some will say they are white and others will say they are black. I shall leave this in a few days for my government, to which I am going with a mighty great desire to make money, for they tell me all new governors set out with the same desire; I will feel the pulse of it and will let thee know if thou art to come and live with me or not. Dapple is well and sends many remembrances to thee; I am not going to leave him behind though they took me away to be Grand Turk. My lady the duchess kisses thy hands a thousand times; do thou make a return with two thousand, for as my master says, nothing costs less or is cheaper than civility. God has not been pleased to provide another valise for me with another hundred crowns, like the one the other day; but never mind, my Teresa, the bell-ringer is in safe quarters, and all will come out in the scouring of the government; only it troubles me greatly what they tell me – that once I have tasted it I will eat my hands off after it; and if that is so it will not come very cheap to me; though to be sure the maimed have a benefice of their own in the alms they beg for; so that one way or another thou wilt be rich and in luck. God give it to thee as he can, and keep me to serve thee. From this castle, the 20th of July, 1614.

Thy husband, the governor.

SANCHO PANZA

When she had done reading the letter the duchess said to Sancho, "On two points the worthy governor goes rather astray; one is in saying or hinting that this government has been bestowed upon him for the lashes that he is to give himself, when he knows (and he cannot deny it) that when my lord the duke promised it to him nobody ever dreamt of such a thing as lashes; the other is that he shows himself here to be very covetous; and I would not have him a money-seeker, for 'covetousness bursts the bag,' and the covetous governor does ungoverned justice."

"I don't mean it that way, senora," said Sancho; "and if you think the letter doesn't run as it ought to do, it's only to tear it up and make another; and maybe it will be a worse one if it is left to my gumption."

"No, no," said the duchess, "this one will do, and I wish the duke to see it."

With this they betook themselves to a garden where they were to dine, and the duchess showed Sancho's letter to the duke, who was highly delighted with it. They dined, and after the cloth had been removed and they had amused themselves for a while with Sancho's rich conversation, the melancholy sound of a fife and harsh discordant drum made itself heard. All seemed somewhat put out by this

dull, confused, martial harmony, especially Don Quixote, who could not keep his seat from pure disquietude; as to Sancho, it is needless to say that fear drove him to his usual refuge, the side or the skirts of the duchess; and indeed and in truth the sound they heard was a most doleful and melancholy one. While they were still in uncertainty they saw advancing towards them through the garden two men clad in mourning robes so long and flowing that they trailed upon the ground. As they marched they beat two great drums which were likewise draped in black, and beside them came the fife player, black and sombre like the others. Following these came a personage of gigantic stature enveloped rather than clad in a gown of the deepest black, the skirt of which was of prodigious dimensions. Over the gown, girdling or crossing his figure, he had a broad baldric which was also black, and from which hung a huge scimitar with a black scabbard and furniture. He had his face covered with a transparent black veil, through which might be descried a very long beard as white as snow. He came on keeping step to the sound of the drums with great gravity and dignity; and, in short, his stature, his gait, the sombreness of his appearance and his following might well have struck with astonishment, as they did, all who beheld him without knowing who he was. With this measured pace and in this guise he advanced to kneel before the duke, who, with the others, awaited him standing. The duke, however, would not on any account allow him to speak until he had risen. The prodigious scarecrow obeyed, and standing up, removed the veil from his face and disclosed the most enormous, the longest, the whitest and the thickest beard that human eyes had ever beheld until that moment, and then fetching up a grave, sonorous voice from the depths of his broad, capacious chest, and fixing his eyes on the duke, he said:

"Most high and mighty senor, my name is Trifaldin of the White Beard; I am squire to the Countess Trifaldi, otherwise called the Distressed Duenna, on whose behalf I bear a message to your highness, which is that your magnificence will be pleased to grant her leave and permission to come and tell you her trouble, which is one of the strangest and most wonderful that the mind most familiar with trouble in the world could have imagined; but first she desires to know if the valiant and never vanquished knight, Don Quixote of La Mancha, is in this your castle, for she has come in quest of him on foot and without breaking her fast from the kingdom of Kandy to your realms here; a thing which may and ought to be regarded as a miracle or set down to enchantment; she is even now at the gate of this fortress or plaisance, and only waits for your permission to enter. I have spoken." And with that he coughed, and stroked down his beard with both his hands, and stood very tranquilly waiting for the response of the duke, which was to this effect: "Many days ago, worthy squire Trifaldin of the White Beard, we heard of the misfortune of my lady the Countess Trifaldi, whom the enchanters have caused to be called the Distressed Duenna. Bid her enter, O stupendous squire, and tell her that the valiant knight Don Quixote of La Mancha is here, and from his generous disposition she may safely promise herself every protection and assistance; and you may tell her, too, that if my aid be necessary it will not be withheld, for I am bound to give it to her by my quality of knight, which involves the protection of women of all sorts, especially widowed, wronged, and distressed dames, such as her ladyship seems to be."

On hearing this Trifaldin bent the knee to the ground, and making a sign to the fifer and drummers to strike up, he turned and marched out of the garden to the same notes and at the same pace as when he entered, leaving them all amazed at his bearing and solemnity. Turning to Don Quixote, the duke said, "After all, renowned knight, the mists of malice and ignorance are unable to hide or obscure the light of valour and virtue. I say so, because your excellence has been barely six days in this castle, and already the unhappy and the afflicted come in quest of you from lands far distant and remote, and not in coaches or on dromedaries, but on foot and fasting, confident that in that mighty arm they will find a cure for their sorrows and troubles; thanks to your great achievements, which are circulated all over the known earth."

"I wish, senor duke," replied Don Quixote, "that blessed ecclesiastic, who at table the other day showed such ill-will and bitter spite against knights-errant, were here now to see with his own eyes

whether knights of the sort are needed in the world; he would at any rate learn by experience that those suffering any extraordinary affliction or sorrow, in extreme cases and unusual misfortunes do not go to look for a remedy to the houses of jurists or village sacristans, or to the knight who has never attempted to pass the bounds of his own town, or to the indolent courtier who only seeks for news to repeat and talk of, instead of striving to do deeds and exploits for others to relate and record. Relief in distress, help in need, protection for damsels, consolation for widows, are to be found in no sort of persons better than in knights-errant; and I give unceasing thanks to heaven that I am one, and regard any misfortune or suffering that may befall me in the pursuit of so honourable a calling as endured to good purpose. Let this duenna come and ask what she will, for I will effect her relief by the might of my arm and the dauntless resolution of my bold heart."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEREIN IS CONTINUED THE NOTABLE ADVENTURE OF THE DISTRESSED DUENNA

The duke and duchess were extremely glad to see how readily Don Quixote fell in with their scheme; but at this moment Sancho observed, "I hope this senora duenna won't be putting any difficulties in the way of the promise of my government; for I have heard a Toledo apothecary, who talked like a goldfinch, say that where duennas were mixed up nothing good could happen. God bless me, how he hated them, that same apothecary! And so what I'm thinking is, if all duennas, of whatever sort or condition they may be, are plagues and busybodies, what must they be that are distressed, like this Countess Three-skirts or Three-tails! – for in my country skirts or tails, tails or skirts, it's all one."

"Hush, friend Sancho," said Don Quixote; "since this lady duenna comes in quest of me from such a distant land she cannot be one of those the apothecary meant; moreover this is a countess, and when countesses serve as duennas it is in the service of queens and empresses, for in their own houses they are mistresses paramount and have other duennas to wait on them."

To this Dona Rodriguez, who was present, made answer, "My lady the duchess has duennas in her service that might be countesses if it was the will of fortune; 'but laws go as kings like;' let nobody speak ill of duennas, above all of ancient maiden ones; for though I am not one myself, I know and am aware of the advantage a maiden duenna has over one that is a widow; but 'he who clipped us has kept the scissors.'"

"For all that," said Sancho, "there's so much to be clipped about duennas, so my barber said, that 'it will be better not to stir the rice even though it sticks.'"

"These squires," returned Dona Rodriguez, "are always our enemies; and as they are the haunting spirits of the antechambers and watch us at every step, whenever they are not saying their prayers (and that's often enough) they spend their time in tattling about us, digging up our bones and burying our good name. But I can tell these walking blocks that we will live in spite of them, and in great houses too, though we die of hunger and cover our flesh, be it delicate or not, with widow's weeds, as one covers or hides a dunghill on a procession day. By my faith, if it were permitted me and time allowed, I could prove, not only to those here present, but to all the world, that there is no virtue that is not to be found in a duenna."

"I have no doubt," said the duchess, "that my good Dona Rodriguez is right, and very much so; but she had better bide her time for fighting her own battle and that of the rest of the duennas, so as to crush the calumny of that vile apothecary, and root out the prejudice in the great Sancho Panza's mind."

To which Sancho replied, "Ever since I have sniffed the governorship I have got rid of the humours of a squire, and I don't care a wild fig for all the duennas in the world."

They would have carried on this duenna dispute further had they not heard the notes of the fife and drums once more, from which they concluded that the Distressed Duenna was making her entrance. The duchess asked the duke if it would be proper to go out to receive her, as she was a countess and a person of rank.

"In respect of her being a countess," said Sancho, before the duke could reply, "I am for your highnesses going out to receive her; but in respect of her being a duenna, it is my opinion you should not stir a step."

"Who bade thee meddle in this, Sancho?" said Don Quixote.

"Who, senor?" said Sancho; "I meddle for I have a right to meddle, as a squire who has learned the rules of courtesy in the school of your worship, the most courteous and best-bred knight in the

whole world of courtliness; and in these things, as I have heard your worship say, as much is lost by a card too many as by a card too few, and to one who has his ears open, few words."

"Sancho is right," said the duke; "we'll see what the countess is like, and by that measure the courtesy that is due to her."

And now the drums and fife made their entrance as before; and here the author brought this short chapter to an end and began the next, following up the same adventure, which is one of the most notable in the history.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. WHEREIN IS TOLD THE DISTRESSED DUENNA'S TALE OF HER MISFORTUNES

Following the melancholy musicians there filed into the garden as many as twelve duennas, in two lines, all dressed in ample mourning robes apparently of milled serge, with hoods of fine white gauze so long that they allowed only the border of the robe to be seen. Behind them came the Countess Trifaldi, the squire Trifaldin of the White Beard leading her by the hand, clad in the finest unnapped black baize, such that, had it a nap, every tuft would have shown as big as a Martos chickpea; the tail, or skirt, or whatever it might be called, ended in three points which were borne up by the hands of three pages, likewise dressed in mourning, forming an elegant geometrical figure with the three acute angles made by the three points, from which all who saw the peaked skirt concluded that it must be because of it the countess was called Trifaldi, as though it were Countess of the Three Skirts; and Benengeli says it was so, and that by her right name she was called the Countess Lobuna, because wolves bred in great numbers in her country; and if, instead of wolves, they had been foxes, she would have been called the Countess Zorruna, as it was the custom in those parts for lords to take distinctive titles from the thing or things most abundant in their dominions; this countess, however, in honour of the new fashion of her skirt, dropped Lobuna and took up Trifaldi.

The twelve duennas and the lady came on at procession pace, their faces being covered with black veils, not transparent ones like Trifaldin's, but so close that they allowed nothing to be seen through them. As soon as the band of duennas was fully in sight, the duke, the duchess, and Don Quixote stood up, as well as all who were watching the slow-moving procession. The twelve duennas halted and formed a lane, along which the Distressed One advanced, Trifaldin still holding her hand. On seeing this the duke, the duchess, and Don Quixote went some twelve paces forward to meet her. She then, kneeling on the ground, said in a voice hoarse and rough, rather than fine and delicate, "May it please your highnesses not to offer such courtesies to this your servant, I should say to this your handmaid, for I am in such distress that I shall never be able to make a proper return, because my strange and unparalleled misfortune has carried off my wits, and I know not whither; but it must be a long way off, for the more I look for them the less I find them."

"He would be wanting in wits, senora countess," said the duke, "who did not perceive your worth by your person, for at a glance it may be seen it deserves all the cream of courtesy and flower of polite usage;" and raising her up by the hand he led her to a seat beside the duchess, who likewise received her with great urbanity. Don Quixote remained silent, while Sancho was dying to see the features of Trifaldi and one or two of her many duennas; but there was no possibility of it until they themselves displayed them of their own accord and free will.

All kept still, waiting to see who would break silence, which the Distressed Duenna did in these words: "I am confident, most mighty lord, most fair lady, and most discreet company, that my most miserable misery will be accorded a reception no less dispassionate than generous and condolent in your most valiant bosoms, for it is one that is enough to melt marble, soften diamonds, and mollify the steel of the most hardened hearts in the world; but ere it is proclaimed to your hearing, not to say your ears, I would fain be enlightened whether there be present in this society, circle, or company, that knight immaculatissimus, Don Quixote de la Manchissima, and his squirissimus Panza."

"The Panza is here," said Sancho, before anyone could reply, "and Don Quixotissimus too; and so, most distressedest Duenissima, you may say what you willissimus, for we are all readissimus to do you any servissimus."

On this Don Quixote rose, and addressing the Distressed Duenna, said, "If your sorrows, afflicted lady, can indulge in any hope of relief from the valour or might of any knight-errant, here

are mine, which, feeble and limited though they be, shall be entirely devoted to your service. I am Don Quixote of La Mancha, whose calling it is to give aid to the needy of all sorts; and that being so, it is not necessary for you, senora, to make any appeal to benevolence, or deal in preambles, only to tell your woes plainly and straightforwardly: for you have hearers that will know how, if not to remedy them, to sympathise with them."

On hearing this, the Distressed Duenna made as though she would throw herself at Don Quixote's feet, and actually did fall before them and said, as she strove to embrace them, "Before these feet and legs I cast myself, O unconquered knight, as before, what they are, the foundations and pillars of knight-errantry; these feet I desire to kiss, for upon their steps hangs and depends the sole remedy for my misfortune, O valorous errant, whose veritable achievements leave behind and eclipse the fabulous ones of the Amadis, Esplandians, and Belianises!" Then turning from Don Quixote to Sancho Panza, and grasping his hands, she said, "O thou, most loyal squire that ever served knight-errant in this present age or ages past, whose goodness is more extensive than the beard of Trifaldin my companion here of present, well mayest thou boast thyself that, in serving the great Don Quixote, thou art serving, summed up in one, the whole host of knights that have ever borne arms in the world. I conjure thee, by what thou owest to thy most loyal goodness, that thou wilt become my kind intercessor with thy master, that he speedily give aid to this most humble and most unfortunate countess."

To this Sancho made answer, "As to my goodness, senora, being as long and as great as your squire's beard, it matters very little to me; may I have my soul well bearded and moustached when it comes to quit this life, that's the point; about beards here below I care little or nothing; but without all these blandishments and prayers, I will beg my master (for I know he loves me, and, besides, he has need of me just now for a certain business) to help and aid your worship as far as he can; unpack your woes and lay them before us, and leave us to deal with them, for we'll be all of one mind."

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