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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Don Quixote: Don Quixote Does Penance As Did The Knights Of Old (9/19)

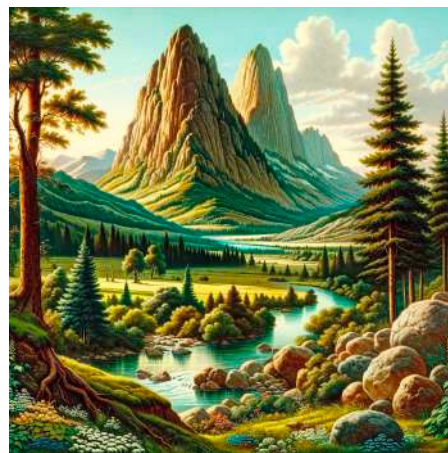
Don Quixote mounted once again on Rozinante, and commanded Sancho to follow him. Dapple, the ass, had been stolen from them one night while they slept, and Sancho was now obliged to walk. They travelled slowly through the thickest and roughest part of the mountains. "What is it that your worship intends to do in this out of the way spot?" asked Sancho.

"I will keep you no longer in the dark," replied Don Quixote. "You must know that Amadis of Gaul was the most perfect of all knights-errant. And as he was the morning star and the sun of all valiant knights, so am I wise in imitating all he did. And I remember that when his lady Oriana disdained his love, he showed his wisdom, virtue, and manhood by changing his name to Beltenebros and retiring to a wild country, there to perform a penance. And as I may more easily imitate him in this than in staying giants, beheading serpents, killing monsters, destroying armies, and putting navies to flight, and because this mountain seems fit for the purpose, I intend myself to do penance here."

By this time they had arrived at the foot of a lofty mountain, which stood like a huge rock apart from all

the rest. Close by glided a smooth river, hemmed in on every side by a green and fertile meadow. Around were many fine trees and plants and flowers, which made the spot a most delightful one.

"Here!" cried Don Quixote in a loud voice, "I elect to do my penance. Here shall the tears from my eyes swell the limpid streams, and here shall the sighs of my heart stir the leaves of every mountain tree. O Dulcinea of Toboso, day of my night and star of my fortunes, consider the pass to which I am come, and return a favourable answer to my wishes!"



With this he alighted from Rozinante, and, taking off his saddle and bridle, gave him a slap on his haunches, and said: "He gives thee liberty that wants it himself, O steed, famous for thy swiftness and the great works thou hast done!"

When Sancho heard all this he could not help saying: "I wish Dapple were here, for he deserves at least as long a speech in his praise; but truly, sir knight, if my journey with your letter, and your penance here are really to take place, it would be better to saddle Rozinante again, that he may supply the want of mine ass that was stolen from me."

"As thou likest about that," said Don Quixote; "but thou must not depart for three days as yet, during which

time thou shalt see what I will say and do for my lady's sake, that thou mayest tell her all about it."

"But what more can I see," asked Sancho, "than what I have already seen?"

"Thou art well up in the matter, certainly," replied his master, "for as yet I have done nothing, and if I am to be a despairing lover, I must tear my clothes, and throw away mine armour, and beat my head against these rocks, with many other things that shall make thee marvel."

"For goodness' sake," cried Sancho, "take care how you go knocking your head against rocks, for you might happen to come up against so ungracious a rock that it would put an end to the penance altogether. If the knocks on the head are necessary, I should content yourself, seeing that this madness is all make-believe, with striking your head on some softer thing, and leave the rest to me, for I will tell your lady that I saw you strike your head on the point of a rock that was harder than a diamond."

"I thank thee, Sancho, for thy good will," replied the knight, "but the rules of knighthood forbid me to act or to speak a lie, and therefore the knocks of the head must be real solid knocks, and it will be necessary for thee to leave me some lint to cure them, seeing that fortune has deprived us of that precious balsam."

"It was worse to lose the ass," said Sancho, "seeing that with him we lost lint and everything; but pray, your worship, never mention that horrible balsam again, for the very name of it nearly turns me inside out. And

now write your letter, and let me saddle Rozinante and begone, for I warrant when I once get to Toboso I will tell the Lady Dulcinea such strange things of your follies and madness, that I shall make her as soft as a glove even though I find her harder than a cork-tree. And with her sweet and honied answer I will return as speedily as a witch on a broom-stick, and release you from your penance."

"But how shall we write a letter here?" said Don Quixote.

"And how can you write the order for the handing over to me of the ass-colts?" asked Sancho.

"Seeing there is no paper," said the knight, "we might, like the ancients, write on waxen tablets, but that wax is as hard to find as paper. But now that I come to think of it, there is Cardenio's pocket-book. I will write on that, and thou shalt have the matter of it written out in a good round hand at the first village wherein thou shalt find a schoolmaster."

"But what is to be done about the signature?" asked Sancho.

"The letters of Amadis were never signed," replied Don Quixote.

"That is all very well," said Sancho, "but the paper for the three asses must be signed, for if it be copied out they shall say it is false, and then I shall not get the ass-colts."

"Well, then, the order for the ass-colts shall be signed in the book," said Don Quixote; "and as for the love-letter, thou shalt put this ending to it, 'Yours till death,

the Knight of the Rueful Countenance.' And it will be no great matter that it goes in a strange hand, for as well as I remember Dulcinea can neither read nor write, nor has she ever seen my handwriting. For indeed, during the twelve years I have been loving her more dearly than the light of my eyes, I have only seen her four times, and I doubt if she hath ever noticed me at all, so closely have her father Lorenzo Corchuelo, and her mother Aldonza brought her up."

"Ha! ha!" cried Sancho, "then the Lady Dulcinea of Toboso is the daughter of Lorenzo Corchuelo, and is called Aldonza Corchuelo?"

"That is she," said Don Quixote, "and a lady worthy to be the empress of this wide universe."

"I know her very well," replied Sancho, "and can tell you that she can throw an iron bar with the strongest lad in our village. She is a girl of mettle, tall and stout, and a sturdy lass that can hold her own with any knight-errant in the world. Out upon her, what an arm she hath! Why, I saw her one day stand on top of the church belfry, to call her father's servants from the fields, and, though they were half a league off, they heard her as though she were in the next field; and the best of her is there is nothing coy about her, but she jokes with all and makes game and jest of everybody. To be frank with you, Sir Don Quixote, I have been living under a great mistake, for, really and truly, I thought all this while that the lady Dulcinea was some great princess with whom your worship was in love."

"I have told thee, Sancho, many times before now," said Don Quixote, "that thou art a very great babbler. Understand, then, that my lady Dulcinea is to me as good and beautiful as any princess in the world, and that is enough."

With these words; he took out the pocket-book, and, going aside, began to write with great gravity. When he had ended, he called Sancho to him and read him the following letter:—

"SOVEREIGN LADY,

"The sere wounded one, O sweetest Dulcinea of Toboso, sends thee the health which he wants himself. If thy beauty disdain me, I cannot live. My good Squire Sancho will give thee ample account, O ungrateful fair one, of the penance I do for love of thee. Should it be thy pleasure to favour me, I am thine. If not, by ending my life I shall satisfy both thy cruelty and my desires.

"Thine until death,

"KNIGHT OF THE RUEFUL COUNTENANCE."

"By my father's life," said Sancho, "it is the noblest thing that ever I heard in my life; and now will your worship write the order for the three ass-colts?"

"With pleasure," answered Don Quixote, and he did as he was desired.

"And now," said Sancho, "let me saddle Rozinante and be off. For I intend to start without waiting to see those mad pranks your worship is going to play. There is one thing I am afraid of, though, and that is, that on my return I shall not be able to find the place where I leave you, it is so wild and difficult."

"Take the marks well, and when thou shouldst return I will mount to the tops of the highest rocks. Also it will be well to cut down some boughs and strew them after you as you go, that they may serve as marks to find your way back."

Sancho did this, and, not heeding his master's request to stay and see him go through some mad tricks in order that he might describe them to Dulcinea, he mounted Rozinante and rode away.

He had not got more than a hundred paces when he returned and said: "Sir, what you said was true, and it would be better for my conscience if I saw the follies you are about to do before I describe them to your lady."

"Did I not tell thee so?" said Don Quixote; "wait but a minute."

Then stripping himself in all haste of most of his clothes, Don Quixote began cutting capers and turning somersaults in his shirt tails, until even Sancho was satisfied that he might truthfully tell the Lady Dulcinea that her lover was mad, and so, turning away, he started in good earnest upon his journey.