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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Don Quixote: The Story Of Cardenio (11/19)

The next day they arrived at the place where Sancho had left the boughs strewn along his path, and there he told them they were near to Don Quixote, and that they had better get dressed. For they had told Sancho part of their plan to take away his master from this wretched penance he was performing, and warned him not to tell the knight who they were. They also said that if Don Quixote asked, as they were sure he would, whether he had delivered his letter to Dulcinea, he was to say that he had done so; but as his lady could not read, she had sent a message that he was to return to her. Sancho listened to all this talk, and said he would remember everything, for he was anxious that his master should give up penances and go forth again in search of islands. He also suggested that it were best he should go on in advance, as perhaps the message from Dulcinea would of itself be enough to bring Don Quixote away from the mountains.

With that, Sancho went off into the mountain gorges, leaving the other two behind by a stream overhung with pleasant trees and rocks.

It was one of the hottest days of August, when in those parts the heat is very great, and it was about three in the afternoon when Sancho left them. The two were

resting in the shade at their ease when they heard the sound of a voice, not accompanied by any instrument, but singing very sweetly and melodiously. The song surprised them not a little, for this did not seem the place in which to find so good a singer.

The singer finished his song, and the barber and curate, in wonder and delight, listened for more. But as silence continued, they agreed to go in search of this strange musician. As they were moving away he again burst into song, and at the end of this, uttered a deep sigh, and the music was changed into sobs and heartrending moans.

They had not gone far in their search when, in turning the corner of a rock, they saw a man with a black and matted beard, his hair long and untangled, his feet unshod and his legs bare. The curate at once went up to him and the man returned his greeting in a hoarse tone but with great courtesy.

"Whoever you may be, good sirs, I see clearly that, unworthy as I am, there are yet human beings who would show me kindness. My name is Cardenio; the place of my birth one of the best cities in Andalusia; my lineage noble, my parents rich, and my misfortunes so great that I think no one was ever to be pitied as I am. A terrible madness masters me to live in these mountains and many blame my outrageous conduct rather than pity my misery. But if you will listen to my story, you will know why I have been driven here, what has made me mad, and will understand how far I ought to be blamed and how much I may be pitied."

The curate and the barber, who wanted nothing better than to learn the cause of his woe from his own lips, asked him to tell his story.

Upon this Cardenio began in the middle of his story and progressed rapidly in spite of repeated questioning until he came to the book that his beloved Lucinda had borrowed about Amadis Gaul.



There was no interruption from any one on this occasion, so Cardenio went on to tell them how, when Lucinda returned the book he found in it a letter full of tender wishes beautifully expressed.

"It was this letter," continued Cardenio, "that moved me to again ask Lucinda for wife; it was this letter also which made Don Fernando determine to ruin me before my happiness could be complete. I told Don Fernando how matters stood with me, and how her father expected mine to ask for Lucinda, and how I dared not speak to my father about it for fear he should refuse his consent; not because he was ignorant of the beauty and worth of Lucinda, but because he did not wish me to marry so soon, or at least not until he had seen what the Duke Ricardo would do for me. I told Don Fernando that I could not venture to speak to my father about it, and he offered to speak on my behalf, and persuade my father to ask for Lucinda's hand.

"How could I imagine that with a gentleman like Fernando, my own friend, such a thing as treachery was possible? But so it was! And my friend, as I thought him, knowing that my presence was a stumbling-block to his plans, asked me to go to his elder brother's to borrow some money from him to pay for six horses which Fernando had bought in the city. It never entered my thoughts to imagine his villainy, and I went with a right good will to do his errand. That night I spoke with Lucinda, and told her what had been arranged between me and Fernando, telling her to hope that all would turn out well. As I left her, tears filled her eyes, and we both seemed full of misery and alarm, tokens, as I now think, of the dark fate that awaited me. I reached the town to which I was sent, and delivered my letters to Don Fernando's brother. I was well received, but there seemed no haste to send me back again, and I was put off with many excuses about the difficulty of raising the money that Don Fernando needed. In this way I rested several days, much to my disgust, and it seemed to me impossible to live apart from Lucinda for so long a time.

"But on the fourth day after I had arrived, there came a man in search of me with a letter, which, by the handwriting, I knew to be Lucinda's. I opened it, not without fear, knowing that it must be some serious matter which would lead her to write to me, seeing she did it so rarely. I asked the bearer, before I read the letter, who had given it to him, and how long it had been on the way. He answered that, passing by chance

at midday through a street in my native city, a very beautiful lady had called to him from a window. Poor thing, said he, her eyes were all bedewed with tears, and she spoke hurriedly, saying: 'Brother, if thou art a good man, as thou seemest to be, I pray thee take this letter to the person named in the address, and in so doing thou shalt do me a great service. And that thou mayest not want money to do it, take what thou shalt find wrapped in that handkerchief.'

"So saying she threw out of the window a handkerchief in which was wrapped a hundred reals, this ring of gold which I carry here, and this letter which I have given you. I made signs to her that I would do what she bade, and as I knew you very well I made up my mind not to trust any other messenger, but to come myself, and so I have travelled this journey, which you know is some eighteen leagues, in but sixteen hours.'

"Whilst the kind messenger was telling his story, I remained trembling with the letter in my hand, until at last I took courage and opened it, when these words caught my eyes:—

"The promise Don Fernando made to you to persuade your father to speak to mine, he has kept after his own fashion. Know, then, that he has himself asked me for wife, and my father, carried away by his rank and position, has agreed to his wishes, so that in two days we are to be privately married. Imagine how I feel, and consider if you should not come at once. Let me hope

that this reaches your hand ere mine be joined to his who keeps his promised faith so ill.'

"Such were the words of her letter, and they caused me at once to set out on my journey without waiting for the despatch of Don Fernando's business, for now I knew that it was not a matter of buying horses, but the pursuit of his own wretched pleasure, that had led to my being sent to his brother. The rage which I felt for Don Fernando, joined to the fear I had of losing the jewel I had won by so many years of patient love, seemed to lend me wings, and I arrived at my native city as swiftly as though I had flown, just in time to see and speak with Lucinda. I entered the city secretly, and left my mule at the house of the honest man who had brought my letter, and went straight to the little iron gate where I had so often met Lucinda.

"There I found her, and as soon as she saw me she said in deep distress: 'Cardenio, I am attired in wedding garments, and in the hall there waits for me the traitor, Don Fernando, and my covetous father, with other witnesses, who shall see my death rather than my wedding. Be not troubled, dear friend, for if I cannot persuade them to give me my freedom, I can at least end my life with this dagger.'

"I answered her in great distress, saying: 'Sweet lady, if thou carriest a dagger, I also carry a sword to defend thy life, or to kill myself, should fortune be against us.'

"I believe she did not hear all I said, for she was hastily called away, and I aroused myself from my grief, as best I could, and went into the house, for I

knew well all the entrances and exits. Then, without being seen, I managed to place myself in a hollow formed by the window of the great hall, which was covered by two pieces of tapestry drawn together, whence I could see all that went on in the hall without any one seeing me.

"The bridegroom entered the hall, wearing his ordinary dress. His groomsman was a first cousin of Lucinda's, and no one else was in the room but the servants of the house. In a little while Lucinda came out of her dressing-room with her mother and two of her maids. My anxiety gave me no time to note what she wore. I was only able to mark the colours, which were crimson and white; and I remember the glimmer with which the jewels and precious stones shone in her head-dress. But all this was as nothing to the singular beauty of her fair golden hair.

"When they were all stood in the hall, the priest of the parish entered, and, taking each by the hand, asked: 'Will you, Lady Lucinda, take the Lord Don Fernando for your lawful husband?' I thrust my head and neck out of the tapestry to hear what Lucinda answered. The priest stood waiting for a long time before she gave it, and then, when I expected, nay, almost hoped, that she would take out the dagger to stab herself, or unloose her tongue to speak the truth, or make some confession of her love for me, I heard her say in a faint and languishing voice, 'I will.'

"Then Don Fernando said the same, and, giving her the ring, the knot was tied. But when the bridegroom

approached to embrace her, she put her hand to her heart and fell fainting in her mother's arms.

"It remains only for me to tell in what a state I was, when in that 'Yes!' I saw all my hopes at an end. I burned with rage and jealousy. All the house was in a tumult when Lucinda fainted, and, her mother unclasping her dress to give her air, found in her bosom a paper, which Fernando seized and went aside to read by the light of a torch. Whilst he read it he fell into a chair and covered his face with his hands in melancholy discontent.

"Seeing every one was in confusion I ventured forth, not caring where I went, not having even a desire to take vengeance on my enemies. I left the house, and came to where I had left my mule, which I caused to be saddled. Then without a word of farewell to any one I rode out of the city, and never turned my head to look back at it again.

"All night I travelled, and about dawn I came to one of the entrances to these mountains, through which I wandered three days at random. I then left my mule, and such things as I had, and took to living in these wilds. My most ordinary dwelling is in the hollow of a cork-tree, which is large enough to shelter this wretched body. The goatherds who live among these mountains give me food out of charity. They tell me, when they meet me in my wits, that at other times I rush out at them and seize with violence the food they would offer me in kindness.

"I know that I do a thousand mad things, but without Lucinda I shall never recover my reason, and I feel certain that my misery can only be ended by death."