

Chapter 4

Concerning what happened to our knight when he left the inn

It must have been dawn when Don Quixote left the inn so contented, so high-spirited, so jubilant at having been dubbed a knight that his joy almost burst the cinches of his horse. But calling to mind the advice of his host regarding the necessary provisions that he had to carry with him, especially money and shirts, he resolved to return to his house and outfit himself with everything, including a squire, thinking he would take on a neighbor of his, a peasant who was poor and had children but was very well suited to the chivalric occupation of squire. With this thought he guided Rocinante toward his village, and the horse, as if he could see his stall, began to trot with so much eagerness that his feet did not seem to touch the ground.

Don Quixote had not gone very far when it seemed to him that from a dense wood on his right there emerged the sound of feeble cries, like those of a person in pain, and as soon as he heard them he said:

“I give thanks to heaven for the great mercy it has shown in so quickly placing before me opportunities to fulfill what I owe to my profession, allowing me to gather the fruit of my virtuous desires. These

cries, no doubt, belong to some gentleman or lady in need who requires my assistance and help.”

And, pulling on the reins, he directed Rocinante toward where he thought the cries were coming from. And after he had taken a few steps into the wood, he saw a mare tied to an oak, and tied to another was a boy about fifteen years old, naked from the waist up, and it was he who was crying out, and not without cause, for with a leather strap a robust peasant was whipping him and accompanying each lash with a reprimand and a piece of advice. For he was saying:

“Keep your tongue still and your eyes open.”

And the boy replied:

“I won’t do it again, Señor; by the Passion of Christ I won’t do it again, and I promise I’ll be more careful from now on with the flock.”

And when Don Quixote saw this, he said in an angry voice:

“Discourteous knight, it is not right for you to do battle with one who cannot defend himself; mount your horse and take up your lance” – for a

lance was leaning against the oak where the mare was tied – “and I shall make you understand that what you are doing is the act of a coward.”

The peasant, seeing a fully armed figure ready to attack and brandishing a lance in his face, considered himself a dead man, and with gentle words he replied:

“Señor Knight, this boy I’m punishing is one of my servants, and his job is to watch over a flock of sheep I keep in this area, and he’s so careless that I lose one every day, and when I punish his carelessness, or villainy, he says I do it out of miserliness because I don’t want to pay him his wages, and by God and my immortal soul, he lies.”

“You dare to say ‘He lies’ in my presence, base varlet?”¹ said Don Quixote. “By the sun that shines down on us, I am ready to run you through with this lance. Pay him now without another word; if you do not, by the God who rules us I shall exterminate and annihilate you here and now. Untie him immediately.”

The peasant lowered his head and, without responding, he untied his servant, and Don Quixote asked the boy how much his master owed him. He said wages for nine months, at seven *reales* a month. Don Quixote calculated the sum and found that it amounted to seventy-three *reales*,² and he told the peasant to take that amount from his purse unless he wanted to die on their account. The terrified farmer replied that by the danger in which he found himself and the oath he had sworn—and so far he had sworn to nothing—the total was not so high, because from that amount one had to subtract and take into account three pairs of shoes that he had given his servant and a *real* for the two bloodlettings he had provided for him when he was sick.

“All of that is fine,” said Don Quixote, “but the shoes and bloodlettings should compensate for the blows you have given him for no reason, for if he damaged the hide of the shoes you paid for, you have damaged the hide of his body, and if the barber drew blood when he was

1. It was considered insulting to call someone a liar in front of others without first begging their pardon.

2. Martin de Riquer, the editor of the Spanish text, speculates that the error in arithmetic may be an intentional, ironic allusion to Cervantes’s three imprisonments for faulty accounts.

sick, you have drawn it when he was healthy; therefore, by this token, he owes you nothing.”

“The difficulty, Señor Knight, is that I have no money here: let Andrés come with me to my house, and I’ll pay him all the *reales* he deserves.”

“Me, go back with him?” said the boy. “Not me! No, Señor, don’t even think of it; as soon as we’re alone he’ll skin me alive, just like St. Bartholomew.”

“No, he will not,” replied Don Quixote. “It is enough for me to command and he will respect me, and if he swears to me by the order of chivalry that he has received, I shall let him go free, and I shall guarantee the payment.”

“Señor, your grace, think of what you are saying,” said the boy. “For this master of mine is no knight and he’s never received any order of chivalry; he’s Juan Haldudo the rich man, and he lives in Quintanar.”

“That is of no importance,” replied Don Quixote. “For there can be knights among Haldudos, especially since each man is the child of his deeds.”

“That’s true,” said Andrés, “but what deeds is this master of mine the son of if he denies me my wages and my sweat and my labor?”

“I don’t deny them, Andrés, my brother,” answered the farmer. “Be so kind as to come with me, and I swear by all the orders of chivalry in the world that I’ll pay you, as I’ve said, one *real* after another, and they’ll be perfumed by my goodwill and pleasure.”

“I absolve you from perfumes,” said Don Quixote. “Just pay him in *reales*, and that will satisfy me, and be sure you fulfill what you have sworn; if you do not, by that same vow I vow that I shall return to find and punish you, and find you I shall, even if you conceal yourself like a wall lizard. And if you wish to know who commands you to do this, so that you have an even greater obligation to comply, know that I am the valiant Don

Quixote of La Mancha, the righter of wrongs and injustices, and now go with God, and do not even think of deviating from what you have promised and sworn, under penalty of the penalty I have indicated to you.”

And having said this, he spurred Rocinante and soon left them behind. The farmer followed him with his eyes, and when he saw that he

had crossed the wood and disappeared from view, he turned to his servant Andrés and said:

“Come here, my son; I want to pay you what I owe you, as that righter of wrongs has ordered me to do.”

“I swear,” said Andrés, “that your grace better do the right thing and obey the commands of that good knight, may he live a thousand years; for, as he’s a valiant man and a fair judge, heaven be praised, if you don’t pay me he’ll come back and do what he said!”

“I swear, too,” said the farmer, “but because I love you so much, I want to increase the debt so I can increase the payment.”

And seizing him by the arm, he tied the boy to the oak tree again and gave him so many lashes that he left him half-dead.

“Now, Señor Andrés,” said the farmer, “you can call the righter of wrongs; you’ll see how he can’t undo this one. Though I don’t think it’s over yet, because I feel like skinning you alive, just as you feared.”

But at last he untied him and gave him permission to go in search of his judge so that he could carry out the sentence. Andrés left in a fairly gloomy frame of mind, swearing he would find the valiant Don Quixote of La Mancha and tell him, point by point, what had happened, and that his master would have to pay a fine and damages. Even so, the boy left weeping and his master stayed behind to laugh.

In this way the valiant Don Quixote righted a wrong, and exceedingly pleased with what had occurred, for it seemed to him that he had given a happy and noble beginning to his chivalric adventures, he was very satisfied with himself as he rode to his village, saying in a quiet voice:

“Well mayest thou call thyself the most fortunate of ladies in the world today, o most beauteous of all the beauteous, Dulcinea of Toboso! For it is thy portion to have as vassal and servant to thy entire will and disposition so valiant and renowned a knight as Don Quixote of La Mancha is and will be, for he, as all men know, received the order of chivalry yesterday and today he has righted the greatest wrong and injustice that iniquity e’er devised and cruelty e’er committed: today he removed the whip from the hand of a merciless enemy who, without reason, did flog that delicate child.”

Saying this, he arrived at a road that divided in four, and immediately there came to his imagination the crossroads where knights errant would begin to ponder which of those roads they would follow, and in order to imitate them, he remained motionless for a time, and after having

thought very carefully, he loosened the reins and subjected his will to Rocinante's, and the horse pursued his initial intent, which was to head back to his own stall.

And having gone about two miles, Don Quixote saw a great throng of people who, as he subsequently discovered, were merchants from Toledo on their way to Murcia to buy silk. There were six of them, holding sunshades, and four servants on horseback, and three boys on foot leading the mules. No sooner had Don Quixote seen them than he imagined this to be a new adventure; and in order to imitate in every way possible the deeds he had read in his books, this seemed the perfect opportunity for him to perform one that he had in mind. And so, with gallant bearing and great boldness, he set his feet firmly in the stirrups, grasped his lance, brought the shield up to his chest, and, stopping in the middle of the road, he waited until those knights errant, for that is what he deemed and considered them to be, had reached him; and when they had come close enough to see and hear him, Don Quixote raised his voice and, in an imperious manner, he said:

"Halt, all of you, unless all of you confess that in the entire world there is no damsel more beautiful than the empress of La Mancha, the peerless Dulcinea of Toboso."

The merchants stopped when they heard these words and saw the strange appearance of the one who said them, and because of his appearance and words, they soon saw the madness of the man, but they wished to see at their leisure the purpose of the confession he was demanding, and one of them, who was something of a jokester and clever in the extreme, said:

"Señor Knight, we do not know this good lady you have mentioned; show her to us, for if she is as beautiful as you say, we will gladly and freely confess the truth you ask of us."

"If I were to show her to you," replied Don Quixote, "where would the virtue be in your confessing so obvious a truth? The significance lies in not seeing her and believing, confessing, affirming, swearing, and defending that truth; if you do not, you must do battle with me, audacious and arrogant people. And whether you come one by one, as the order of chivalry demands, or all at once, in the vicious manner of those of your ilk, here I am, ready and waiting for you, certain of the rightness of my claim."

"Señor Knight," replied the merchant, "in the name of all these princes, of whom I am one, and in order not to burden our consciences

with the confession of something we have never seen or heard, and which, moreover, is so prejudicial to the empresses and queens of Alcarria and Extremadura, I implore your grace to have the goodness to show us a portrait of this lady, even if it is no larger than a grain of wheat; for with a single thread one has the entire skein, and we will be satisfied and certain, and your grace will be recompensed and requited, and although I believe we are so partial to your position that even if her portrait shows us that she is blind in one eye and that blood and brimstone flow from the other, despite all that, to please your grace, we will praise her in everything you might wish."

"Nothing flows from her, vile rabble," replied Don Quixote, burning with rage. "Nothing flows from her, I say, but amber and delicate musk; and she is not blind or humpbacked but as upright as a peak of the Guadarramas. But you will pay for how you have blasphemed against beauty as extraordinary as that of my lady!"

And, having said this, he lowered his lance and charged the man who had spoken, with so much rage and fury that if, to the daring merchant's good fortune, Rocinante had not tripped and fallen on the way, things would have gone badly for him. Rocinante fell, and his master rolled some distance on the ground, and when he tried to get up, he could not: he was too burdened by lance, shield, spurs, helmet, and the weight of his ancient armor. And as he struggled to stand, and failed, he said:

"Flee not, cowards; wretches, attend; for it is no fault of mine but of my mount that I lie here."

One of the muledrivers, who could not have been very well intentioned, heard the poor man on the ground making these insolent statements, and he could not stand by without giving him his response in the ribs. And walking up to him, he took the lance, broke it into pieces, and with one of them he began to beat our knight so furiously that notwithstanding and in spite of his armor, he thrashed Don Quixote as if he were threshing wheat. His masters shouted for him to stop and let him be, but by now the muledriver's blood was up and he did not want to leave the game until he had brought into play the last of his rage, and having recourse to the other pieces of the lance, he shattered them all on the wretched man on the ground, who, despite that storm of blows raining down on him, did not once close his mouth but continued to rail against heaven and earth and these wicked knaves, which is what they seemed to him.

The muledriver tired, and the merchants continued on their way, taking with them stories to tell about the beaten man for the rest of the journey. And he, when he found himself alone, tried again to see if he could stand, but if he could not when he was hale and healthy, how could he when he was beaten almost to a pulp? And still he considered himself fortunate, for it seemed to him that this was the kind of mishap that befell knights errant, and he attributed it all to his horse's misstep, but his body was so bruised and beaten it was not possible for him to stand.