

CERVANTES

Don Quixote



CHAPTER ONE

A Gentleman from La Mancha

In the Spanish village of La Mancha, there lived a gentleman who loved to read. His favorite stories were of knights and their code of chivalry: full of dragons, magic swords, enchanted forests, and damsels in distress.

This gentleman was not a wealthy man, but rather a hidalgo. A hidalgo was a landowner who was richer than a peasant, but poorer than a nobleman. His name was Senor Quixano.

Senor Quixano lived modestly with his housekeeper and his young niece. He was a tall, thin man in his fifties. He was a strong and healthy man, who went hunting every morning.

However, he started to read adventure stories all the time. His best friends, the local priest and the village barber, were worried. Their friend suddenly began spending night and day in his chair, reading adventure books through crazed, bloodshot eyes.

Soon he started thinking these stories were true. Finally he went completely crazy.

Waking up in his reading chair one morning, Senor Quixano announced, "I'm going to become a knight-errant!"

"A what?" asked his concerned niece.

"A knight-errant is a righter of wrongs, a friend to the unfortunate, a rescuer of fair maidens, and a killer of dragons!"

"But Uncle," she cried, "there are no dragons in Spain! And who are these maidens who need rescuing?"

The old man went to the attic of his house and found a rusty old suit of armor. He put the suit on and felt ready for action.

In a bold voice, he announced, "Now, to my faithful steed.

This "steed" was really a worn-out nag. But to his delusional eyes, it was a valiant war horse.

"I name you Rocinante, Queen of the hacks! And I will call myself.

He took a moment to think of the perfect name. "Don Quixote!"

"Now I must dedicate my life to a lady!"

"Do you know a lady?" sobbed the man's niece, frightened by his insane ramblings.

"All knights know a lady," the man replied. "When I conquer a giant or capture a villain, I'll parade them in front of her to prove my love and loyalty."

Then he remembered stories he had heard of a beautiful peasant girl from the nearby village of El Toboso. Having lost his grip on reality, he decided that she was a lonely princess.

"What's her name?" demanded his niece, hoping to bring him to his senses.

Quickly, he invented a name. "All of the sweetest ladies are named Dulcinea. Her name is Dulcinea del Toboso, and to her I dedicate my life! Don't try to stop me. I must go!"

Then he picked up his sword, a cracked old lance, and a leather shield and marched out to the stable. A few minutes later, he rode out in search of his first knightly adventure. Don Quixote soon realized that he had not been knighted. "I must find a lord or lady to dub me a knight," he said. "I don't want to be called a fraud!"

All day Don Quixote rode the scorching plain searching for adventure, but nothing happened. By sunset, he and Rocinante were hungry and tired. In the fading light, the armored man saw an inn and rode toward it. "Perhaps we'll find shelter at that castle," he said to his horse.

The inn was of the common shabby type found along the highways of Spain. In front of the inn were two dirty-faced peasant girls, who watched in shock as this man in rusty armor approached them.

"Good evening, fair maidens," he said. "I am the knight, Don Quixote de La Mancha. Please summon a trumpeter to announce my arrival."

In his eyes, this old inn was a great castle with tall silver towers. Don Quixote became annoyed when the girls just giggled.

But at this moment, a pig-handler stepped out of the inn and blew his horn to round up his grunting animals for the night. Don Quixote mistook the sound of the horn for a chorus of pipes and trumpets.

Then the innkeeper came to the knight. "If you're looking for a bed for the night, I'm sorry to tell you that we're all full."

"Sire, are you the master of this castle?" asked Don Quixote politely.

Looking at this man in his rusty armor, the innkeeper realized that he was obviously crazy. The innkeeper decided to have some fun with this loon.

"All of the royal apartments in my castle are full."

"That's okay," replied Don Quixote. "A good knight has no need for comfort. I'll be happy to sleep on the ground with a rock for a pillow."

"You're a knight, aren't you?" the innkeeper asked mischievously.

"I am an apprentice knight," replied Don Quixote. "I seek a kind lord who will dub me a knight with his sword."

"I see," said the innkeeper, "but I'm busy now caring for my other guests. I'll be back to you when I get a chance." "Thank you, my lord," replied Don Quixote.

After some rest, Don Quixote grew impatient and sent for the innkeeper. When the innkeeper stumbled out, Don Quixote said, "Lord, I can wait no longer. Please tell me what good deed I must do to earn my knighthood."

The innkeeper said, "If you want me to knight you, stay here and guard my courtyard tonight."

With that, he turned and stomped off to the kitchen.

Don Quixote picked up his weapons and walked to the middle of the courtyard, next to a water trough. Inside, the innkeeper told his guests about the madman who thought he was a knight in the courtyard.

A few hours later, a muleteer approached the trough with his animals.

"Stand back, foolish knight!" shouted Don Quixote. "I will defend this magic well to the death!"

"But my mules need water," cried the peasant as he pushed past Don Quixote.

Swinging his lance, Don Quixote hit the man on the head and knocked him out.

"I have done my first good deed!" exclaimed Don Quixote. "When this man awakes, I must send him to my lady Dulcinea to pay his respects."

Alarmed by the noise, the other muleteers rushed out of the inn and attacked Don Quixote.

"A swarm of evil knights attacks me!" cried Don Quixote as he blocked their flying stones with his shield.

The innkeeper realized that he needed to get rid of this dangerous screwball.

"Dear knight," he said to Don Quixote, "forgive these evil knights and put down your weapons. You have proved your courage. I will dub you a knight without delay. Kneel down."

Obediently, Don Quixote knelt amid the straw and dung of the yard.

"I hereby appoint you to the order of righteous knights," cried the innkeeper, smacking Don Quixote across the back with his own

sword.

Don Quixote jumped to his feet excitedly, "My lord, I owe you everything!"

"Yes, yes," replied the innkeeper. "Now you must go off on your good-deed doing and wrong-righting."

"At once!" cried Don Quixote, who hurried to the stable, mounted Rocinante, and rode out into the dawn of La Mancha.

Shortly after, Don Quixote spotted a group of silk merchants coming toward him on the road.

"Here is an opportunity for gallantry."

Riding in front of the group, he blocked the road. "Halt, cretins! None shall be allowed to pass without proclaiming that my lady, Dulcinea del Toboso, is the most beautiful maiden in the world!"

The traders stopped and looked at each other. It was obvious to them that they were in the presence of a madman.

"I want to see her first before I can proclaim her beauty. How do we know that she's not just some old sloppy chops?" said the joker of the group.

"Sloppy chops?" screamed Don Quixote. "Prepare to do battle, you impudent knave!" Don Quixote raised his lance and charged the group. But Rocinante was not accustomed to speed and stumbled. Don Quixote was thrown through the air and landed in a ditch with a crash. The merchants went away, laughing loudly.

Hours later, a passing farmer heard a whimper. He found Don Quixote in the ditch, covered in mud. The farmer recognized him as Senor Qixano from the village. He hurriedly picked up Don Quixote and carried him home. There the knight was tucked safely into his own bed.

CHAPTER TWO

Knight & Squire

For two weeks Don Quixote rested in his house, making everyone think he had regained his sanity.

But he had secretly sold some of his land to finance his next adventure. He was also looking for a squire to accompany him.

The only man Don Quixote found who would work for him was a fat little farmer named Sancho Panza. He was a total dunce.

"This squire job sounds like hard work," said Sancho. "I'd rather be at home with my family, munching on a big plate of pork."

Sancho Panza loved wine, food, and afternoon naps more than anything else.

"But squires always receive great prizes of gold and land from the knights they serve," promised Don Quixote. "If you serve me, you'll surely end up as the governor of some rich island."

"My own island!" Sancho repeated, licking his lips. "Okay, I'll grab my bags and saddle up my donkey."

Then the two left in the middle of the night without telling anyone.

By dawn, the two men were in the middle of a wide plain. Squinting in the glare of the brilliant sun, Don Quixote saw thirty or forty windmills in the fields before them. "Sancho, fortune is smiling upon us!" he called. "Does that mean it's time for breakfast?" replied Sancho.

"This is no time for eating, you pig. Look at those giants over there. I'll kill every one of them. Our great service will be remembered for centuries!"

"What giants?" cried Sancho Panza.

"Over there! The ones with the long arms!"

"But Master, those are windmills."

"Don't contradict me," scolded Don Quixote. "I know an army of giants when I see them!"

Don Quixote spurred Rocinante into a gallop and raised his lance.

"Giants! Prepare to fight!" he shouted.

Charging into the nearest tower, he thrust the shaft of his lance into a sweeping sail. The weapon shattered, and the knight was picked up off his horse and tossed into the air.

He landed with a great "BOOM!" fifty meters away in a large puff of white dust.

Trotting over on his donkey, Sancho Panza said, "I told you they were windmills."

"You fool!" said Don Quixote. "When I charged those giants, an evil wizard flew by on an invisible horse and cast a spell that changed them into windmills! To rob me of my glory!"

"I see," said Sancho, believing every word as he helped his master to his feet.

"Don't worry, my squire. I'll find this wizard and destroy him!"

The next morning, they began traveling again without breakfast, to Sancho's dismay. An hour later, they saw a large cloud of dust in the distance.

"It must be two bloodthirsty armies in battle!" exclaimed Don Quixote. Then he quickly described both of the armies, including the names of their generals and fiercest knights which he made up.

"How do we know that this isn't just a trick by those evil wizards?"

"Can't you hear thousands of marching feet?" yelled Don Quixote, who raised his broken lance and charged them.

"They're not soldiers," cried Sancho, "It's just a large flock of sheep!"

The knight began skewering the poor sheep on the end of his lance. As soon as the shepherds saw him killing their animals, they began pelting him with stones. A rock smashed the side of Don Quixote's face and knocked him off Rocinante.

"Those evil wizards!" cried Don Quixote, spitting out a mouthful of blood and the chips of broken teeth. "They've done it again!"

In a nearby meadow, the knight and the squire found a place to rest for the night.

"I'll have dinner ready in a minute," said Sancho.

"Oh, Squire, how can you think of eating in the moment of my greatest despair?"

"There's nothing more important to me than eating," Sancho said, devouring raw onion and salami. "What are you so sad about anyway?"

Holding his throbbing head, the knight answered, "The loss of half my ear and four teeth saddens me."

"I'm not surprised. There will be nothing left of you in a week or two. I've never seen a man more miserable. We should call you the Knight of the Long Face. Your chin is almost scraping the ground."

"Yes, my squire, that's an excellent name for such an unhappy knight as myself.

The two realized that they were thirsty. An hour later, they located a stream in the forest. As the sun began to set, they heard a terrible sound coming from within the depths of the forest.

"This is an enchanted forest ruled by a terrible ogre. I will find and destroy him with my lightning lance. If I'm not back in three days, go to my lady Dulcinea and tell her I died valiantly in her honor."

Sancho Panza was afraid to be left alone, so he slipped off his donkey and sneaked under Rocinante's hind legs. There he tied a loop of rope to hold her still.

When Don Quixote tried to spur the nag on, she could not move.

"What magic is this?" boomed Don Quixote. "My steed is held still."

"Oh, it must be that evil wizard again," lied Sancho. "Perhaps it would be better to destroy the ogre in the morning."

"Yes, I will break this spell in the morning," agreed Don Quixote.

The two men spent the rest of the night trembling in the forest for fear of the terrible noise coming from down the river.

At dawn, Sancho slipped the rope from Rocinante's hind legs. When Don Quixote mounted her, she could walk.

"I'm free!" exclaimed the knight happily. Then they set off to search for the ogre.

But when they found the source of the terrible crashing sound, it wasn't an ogre but an old water machine, clanking away under the power of a water- fail.

Sancho Panza began laughing at Don Quixote's newest folly. "We just spent the night trembling in fear of this!" he laughed.

The Knight of the Long Face was even more miserable after this failed adventure. But late that afternoon, he saw something that lifted his spirits.

"Look, Sancho, do you see that knight riding toward us?"

"I see a man on a donkey," replied Sancho.

"That knight is Horatio the Brave, and his helmet is the most valuable on Earth."

"I think that's a barber's wash basin on his head."

"No, it's a solid gold battle helmet. I will challenge him and win it!"

Don Quixote shouted, "Surrender your helmet, Horatio, or I'll spear you with my lance!"

"I have no helmet," cried the man. "I'm just a barber. This brass basin is for my work. I put it on my head because it was raining."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" scoffed Don Quixote, drawing his sword.

Don Quixote snatched the basin from the man and placed it on his head. "The visor is missing, and someone has tried to melt the gold off. But I shall wear it with pride."

Sancho tried not to giggle at the sight of Don Quixote with the wash basin on his head.

Later they came to a line of a dozen men with heavy chains around their necks and hands. Four soldiers herded them, cursing and lashing them with whips.

"Prisoners," said Sancho, "off to row the king's boat."

"I don't believe it," said Don Quixote. "These unfortunate men are being held against their will. It is my duty to rescue them."

"Master," said Sancho with alarm, "these men are terrible criminals. They must pay for their crimes!"

"Move aside!" commanded one of the soldiers.

"These men are vulnerable and needy," said Don Quixote. "As a knight-errant, I offer them protection!"

"This crazy old fool is out of his mind," laughed the sergeant. "He's got a wash basin on his head!"

As the other soldiers laughed, Don Quixote smashed the sergeant over the head with his lance and knocked him unconscious. The other soldiers attacked him, but the convicts attacked them faster. One of the convicts stole the keys from the sergeant's pocket and unlocked the other criminals. The convicts overtook the soldiers easily.

"My friends," cried Don Quixote, "I have given you freedom. All I ask in return is that you go to the village of El Toboso and testify of my courage to my mistress."

"He's as crazy as a coconut!" yelled one of the convicts. "Grab him!"

The convicts attacked Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and beat them. They robbed their saddlebags and cracked Don Quixote's basin on a rock before running away.

Sancho Panza cried, "Now we're going to be in big trouble. We'll be wanted men. The Holy Brotherhood Police will be after us!"

CHAPTER THREE

The Giant Killer

To escape from the Holy Brotherhood, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza fled into the mountains. They traveled high up to desolate lonely country of the Sierra Moreno range.

"All great men go through a period of despair when they question everything they believe in," Don Quixote said. He turned to his hungry squire, "I am sending you to El Toboso, with a message of my love for Dulcinea. She must tell me whether she can return my love or not. I will stay here and whip myself until you return."

All Sancho could think about was the feast he was going to eat as soon as he got back to a village.

"Ride quickly, Sancho Panza," commanded Don Quixote as he took off his armor. Then he smashed himself in the chest with a large rock and began to beat himself on the back with a tree branch. Riding away from the strange scene. Sancho called to his master, "Don't overdo it, or there'll be nothing left of you before I can return."

Halfway to the village, Sancho stopped at an inn for the feast he had been waiting for. As he approached the door after his big meal, he came face to face with Don Quixote's old friends, the priest and the barber.

"Hey, you work for our troubled friend, Senor Quixano, don't you?" the priest said to Sancho.

"It's true. I am his squire."

"How can you believe his nonsense? Don't you realize he has lost his mind?"

"There have been some strange things happening," replied Sancho.

"Where is he now?" demanded the barber.

"He's in the mountains, waiting for me to return with an answer from his mistress, the lady Dulcinea del Toboso."

"Her answer to what?" asked the priest.

"Something about love," answered Sancho.

"Take us to him. We have to bring him back to the village with us," said the priest.

"I will, but I warn you he'll never come back with you."

"Hmm," said the barber, "I have a plan. I'll be back in a minute."

Shortly after, the barber came back with two dresses from the innkeeper's wife.

The three traveled back to the mountains. That night, they camped and discussed the details of their plan. In the morning, Sancho went off to find Don Quixote and tell him about the ladies in need of help. Meanwhile, the priest and the barber put on the dresses and began cooking bacon over the fire for their breakfast. As they ate and talked, they saw a beautiful woman passing by.

"We must show ourselves at once," said the priest. They stepped out to meet her.

The girl screamed when she saw them, and tried to run away.

"Do not fear us," shouted the priest, "I am a man of God!"

"If you're a priest, why are you wearing that dress?" she questioned.

"It's a long story," he replied.

"By the way, why are you wandering these hills?" asked the barber.

The beautiful young girl then told her sad story. "My name is Dorotea. I am the daughter of a wealthy farmer. I was to be married to the Duke's son, Ferdinando. But he left me for another woman. I was so broken-hearted that I came here to cry away the rest of my days."

Then the priest had an idea. "Perhaps a truly beautiful lady such as yourself could convince Don Quixote to come back to our village, rather than an old priest and barber dressed like women."

Dorotea agreed to their plan and put on one of the dresses.

When Sancho returned, he led them to Don Quixote, who was still lashing himself with the branch of an old olive tree.

Immediately, Dorotea fell to her knees. "Please, brave knight, a terrible giant is attacking my father's kingdom. You must help us!"

"Of course I will help you! Sancho, prepare my horse. We leave at once. I cannot refuse a princess in distress."

Later the group arrived at the inn where Sancho had first met the barber and the priest. The innkeeper ran out to greet them and was met by the priest. The priest handed him ten gold pieces and said, "My friend in the iron suit is mad. He thinks he's a knight and this is a castle. I ask you only to play along for the night and let us stay until morning."

"Yes, my wife heard something about a lunatic roaming the valley," said the innkeeper. "I heard the Holy Brotherhood is searching for him. You may stay, but your crazy friend will have to stay in the hayloft where I keep my wine, so he won't bother anyone."

The priest and barber agreed.

Long past midnight, after everyone had gone to bed, the priest awoke to the loud sound of gushing liquid, as if a river had burst into the inn. Suddenly, Sancho Panza stumbled into the room, covered in blood. "My master is fighting a giant upstairs! It's a bloodbath up there!"

The priest helped him up and tasted some of the redness on his fingers. "Sancho, this isn't blood, you simpleton. It's wine!"

Sprinting up the stairs, the priest shuddered when he saw what had happened. There was Don Quixote, swinging his sword and stabbing the huge pigskin sacks full of wine hung from the ceiling.

"Ah ha!" cried Don Quixote as the wine splashed out over him, blinding his eyes. "Another fatal wound. Soon there will be no more blood left in your body. Victory will be mine!"

The innkeeper raced upstairs screaming, "Oh no, you're a madman. My best wine is all gone. My wife has sent for the Holy Brotherhood. You'll pay for all of this damage!"

As the officers of the Holy Brotherhood arrived to arrest Don Quixote, the priest came and took one of the officers aside for a moment. He explained that Don Quixote was crazy and needed to be taken home for medical attention. The priest also told the officer to have his men put some chalk on their faces.

Soon after, Dorotea came to Don Quixote. "Brave knight, you have slain the giant and saved my father's kingdom. I thank you."

"It was my pleasure, dear princess," said Don Quixote.

Suddenly the knight was surrounded by eight ghostly figures with white faces.

One of them stepped forward and said,

"We are demons, sent by the evil wizard to take you back to your village! Get into this cage!"

Don Quixote tried to fight, but the eight men seized him and locked him into the cage. Don Quixote struggled to break free from the cage until his strength was gone. Then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

New Quest

Don Quixote stayed in bed for several weeks. His niece and housekeeper watched him closely, hoping his knightly madness was finished.

One day, the barber and the priest visited him.

"I'm fully recovered and ready to get back to my old life," said Don Quixote.

"So old friend," asked the priest, "what do you think our king should do about this Turkish sultan who has threatened to attack our shores?"

"I would hold a jousting contest to find the bravest knight in all of Spain," said Don Quixote. "Then I would send that single courageous knight to conquer the sultan's armies."

Don Quixote sat up in bed, demonstrating the sword thrusts to destroy the sultan's forces.

"Oh dear," said the barber to the priest, "it seems as if our friend's sanity has not returned. We may have to employ more shocking tactics to bring his mind back."

Suddenly Sancho squeezed into the room with a grin on his face and gave the old knight some good news.

"Last night I was at a party to welcome back young Carrasco, who has been studying at Salamanca University. Before I could say 'hello', he told me he had read about all of our adventures," said Sancho. "Somebody wrote a book called Don Quixote, and it's the biggest bestseller in all of Spain!"

"Bring him to me, my squire. I must meet this young man," said Don Quixote.

A few minutes later, Sancho returned, leading a young man with a chubby face and a mischievous expression into the room.

Before Don Quixote could speak, the youth fell onto his knees and said, "Oh, great knight, I'm humbled to be in your excellent presence!"

Carrasco kept talking, trying to control his giggles. "In all the history of chivalry, no one can find a braver, more extraordinary knight than Don Quixote. The book is beloved by every man and woman in every social class. The author is even talking about writing part two!"

"Well then," cried Don Quixote, hopping out of bed, "it's time to get back in the saddle. My public needs me!"

Seven days later, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza saddled their mounts and prepared to ride. Carrasco was there to wish them farewell.

Suddenly the housekeeper and niece burst out of the house and cried, "What's going on here? Where's the priest? He must stop this madness!"

Carrasco whispered to them, "Don't worry. The priest and I have a plan to bring him home. You'll see in a day or two."

Then Don Quixote shouted farewell, and they rode off.

"So what's our first move?" asked Sancho after they had been riding for an hour.

"We are riding to El Toboso where you will guide me to the palace of my mistress."

"Oh no," fretted Sancho. "I'm not sure I can remember where she lives."

Later they found themselves riding around the dark streets of El Toboso, hopelessly lost. Sancho convinced Don Quixote that they should wait until morning to find Dulcinea. After eating breakfast at their campsite, Sancho rode off, trying to figure out what to do.

As he was trying to think of a solution, Sancho saw three peasant girls riding across the plain on donkeys. He had an idea. He turned around and rode back to camp.

"Master, I have great news," he cried.

"Will she allow me to visit?" Don Quixote asked hopefully.

"Polish your suit. She couldn't wait for your visit. She's riding here with two of her maids."

Don Quixote ran around in a panic. Sancho helped him into his armor, and minutes later they were riding through the trees.

"Where is she?" cried Don Quixote.

"Over there," said Sancho, pointing to the peasant girls who were riding past.

"All I see are three ugly girls on donkeys," said Don Quixote.

"But sir, those are the prettiest women I have ever seen."

Don Quixote walked up to them and asked the one in the middle, "Are you my mistress, Princess? Are you Dulcinea, the sweetest rose in Spain?"

The girl let out a big laugh, "Sorry, Granddad, I can't waste time talking with lunatics."

Then she kicked Sancho so hard he almost fell off his donkey. The girls rode off, leaving Don Quixote in a cloud of dust.

"The evil wizard has changed my love into a disgusting country wench!" cried Don Quixote.

"It's terrible," cried Sancho, clapping his hands with glee because his plan was working so well.

"Now I am truly the Knight of the Long Face. This evil wizard has struck me in my weakest spot! I must find a way to break his spell and restore her beauty!"

Don Quixote spent the rest of that day crying in the woods, reciting poetry about lost love. Sancho contented himself with two salamis and a leather cask of wine.

Suddenly Don Quixote hissed, "I hear two men approaching in the forest."

"Where?" asked Sancho.

"On the other side of those bushes."

Then the two sat and listened.

"My lady, Casilda, is the most lovely woman in Spain!" said the voice. "And she has sent me, the Knight of the Forest, on my mission to destroy all knights who would disagree."

"This knight lies," whispered Don Quixote.

"You are mistaken!" shouted Don Quixote, stepping out of the bushes to face the knight.

"I must tell you that my Dulcinea is the most beautiful woman on Earth."

"Then we must do battle," the other knight replied coolly.

"We will joust at dawn," replied Don Quixote.

"Yes, but there is one condition. The loser must return to his village and swear to stay there and not enter any combat for one year."

"I accept," answered Don Quixote.

The next morning at dawn, the knights met on opposite sides of a clearing. To the left of the Knight of the Forest was his squire, a hunchback with a large purple nose.

Without warning, the Knight of the Forest spurred his steed into a gallop and charged Don Quixote with his lance. Don Quixote immediately raised his lance. At the last moment, the Knight of the Forest's horse neighed and refused to take another step. Don Quixote charged with all his might and knocked the other knight out of his saddle. Don Quixote quickly jumped down from Rocinante, drawing his sword and holding it to the downed knight's neck.

"Do you surrender?" Don Quixote demanded.

"Yes," cried the Knight of the Forest, "I'm finished."

Then Don Quixote commanded Sancho to remove the knight's helmet.

"Well," cried Sancho, "this knight looks like that youth Carrasco!"

"Yes, he does," agreed Don Quixote. "The power of this evil wizard to change people's faces is amazing."

"No, I really am Carrasco," sobbed the student.

"It would be safer to kill him now," said Sancho. Don Quixote raised his sword to strike, but the hunchback rushed over and flung off his robe. It was Don Quixote's friend, the barber. "Put your sword away," he said.

"Amazing," said Don Quixote, "This evil wizard never stops."

The barber dragged Carrasco away toward their campsite, cursing him for not being better in a joust.

The next morning found Don Quixote and Sancho Panza riding through a wheat field. The victory over the Knight of the Forest left Don Quixote feeling unstoppable. He didn't suspect for a moment that it had been a plot hatched by the priest to bring him back to the village.

Stepping onto the road, the knight and his squire came upon a royal cart. Raising his lance, Don Quixote blocked the cart and said, "Halt, or I'll slice you in two. I demand to know what you have in this cart."

"A lion," called one of the cart drivers, "A gift to our king from an African prince."

"Dangerous?" asked Don Quixote.

"It's thirsty for blood. It's even more dangerous because it's hungry. So clear off, old man, before you get hurt."

"I am Don Quixote," proclaimed the knight. "And I'm not afraid of any pussy cats!"

Then he swung his lance below the driver's nose. "Open the cage!"

Sancho and the driver's mate quickly ran up a nearby hill, while Don Quixote positioned himself in front of the lion's cage, and the driver prepared to pull a rope that would open it.

"Will you reconsider?" asked the driver.

"Don Quixote does not fear danger!" shouted the knight. "Pull!"

The door crashed open, and a gigantic lion stuck his head into the air. His jaws were black and covered with thick drool, his teeth yellow and curved like knives. The lion's eyes blazed as if on fire.

"I'm waiting for you, King of the jungle," Don Quixote cried fearlessly. "Are you afraid to come out?"

The lion stared at the old knight for a moment, and then yawned and went to sleep.

"This lion is a coward!" shouted Don Quixote. "Driver, rattle his cage. Make him roar!"

"I will not!" replied the driver, dropping the rope that closed the lion's cage. "You are the bravest man in Spain. No one else would go up against a man-killer."

"Will you swear to our king?" asked Don Quixote.

"He will receive a full report of your bravery," replied the driver.

Don Quixote signaled to Sancho and the driver's mate that it was safe to return.

"From this day on," announced Don Quixote, "I wish to be known as the Knight of the Lions. Men will tell tales of this adventure hundreds of years to come!"

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Adventures

Sancho grumbled and sulked for three days as Don Quixote led them through the forest. Their food was almost gone, and the squire had to go to sleep hungry, under a damp blanket worrying about wolves and other predators. Don Quixote was proud of their sufferings, often reminding Sancho that "a hard life makes a brave heart."

On the fourth day, at sunset, they came across a group of riders. Among them was a lady dressed in green velvet. She sat atop a majestic white stallion and held a falcon on her arm.

"A huntress," gasped Don Quixote. "Perhaps even a princess. She'll certainly want to be introduced to me."

"She probably just wants us to mind our own business," Sancho replied with a grin.

Ignoring his squire, the knight commanded him, "Ride over there and introduce me."

Sancho groaned and spurred his donkey in the group's direction.

"My lady," he called. "My master, the Knight of the Lions, formerly known as the Knight of the Long Face, wishes to..."

"Wait," interrupted the lady, "Did you say the Knight of the Long Face?"

"Yes, and I'm his squire, Sancho..."

"Panza?" interrupted the lady again with a smile.

"Yes," gulped Sancho. "Do you know about us?"

"Of course," she replied. "I've read the book of your adventures. It's my husband's and my favorite book!"

"Shall I bring him over then?" asked Sancho.

"You must do more than that," said the lady. "You and your master must come to our nearby castle as distinguished guests of my husband, the Duke."

The Duchess giggled when Sancho accepted her invitation. In truth, she and her husband thought the book Don Quixote was the finest comedy ever written. She and her husband were great jesters, and she figured they would be able to have some fun with the crazy knight and his dim-witted sidekick.

The group with Don Quixote and Sancho soon crossed a drawbridge and found themselves inside a vast, opulent castle. Two trumpeters sounded the knight's arrival, and a group of maidens surrounded them, fanning jars of perfume.

That night, the knight and his squire ate the best meal of their lives while chatting with their hosts. The Duke and Duchess listened with great interest about all of their recent adventures. But their greatest interest was in hearing news of Dulcinea.

When they asked about Dulcinea, the knight replied sadly, "My beautiful lady has been transformed into a vulgar, donkey-riding trollop by an evil wizard."

"How terrible!" gasped the Duchess, barely able to contain her laughter.

The next day, the Duke and Duchess convinced Don Quixote to accompany them on a wild boar hunt in the forest. But they had made secret plans to play a big joke on the knight and his squire.

While they were hunting, there was a sudden noise coming through the trees.

"My men must have found a boar. It's coming toward us. Beware its tusks!" said the Duchess.

But when the trees parted, there was no wild boar. Rather, a black stallion came prancing and kicking before them. On its back rode a man, covered in twigs, leaves, and ivy.

"I am the forest sprite!" the strange figure wearing a green mask with horns on top of his head shouted. "The demons of the forest have sent me with a message for the knight-errant, Don Quixote de La Mancha!"

"I am Don Quixote," replied the knight.

"To free your lady from their spell," the sprite continued, "you must do two things. First of all, your squire must lash himself."

"How many times?" screamed Sancho.

"Three thousand, three hundred times."

Sancho gasped in disbelief.

"But first, you must ride a flying horse through the air and over the mountains. This horse waits for you at the Duke's castle. If you are brave enough to perform these two tasks, your beloved Dulcinea will be set free," said the forest sprite.

Then the creature turned and rode away.

"It's a miracle!" cried the Duchess, "We must return to the castle at once!"

"Yes, but first, Sancho, fetch me a whip," shouted Don Quixote. "You can begin lashing yourself while we ride!"

The terrified squire had already ridden away from the knight's grasp.

Back at the castle, the servants were rushing around, shouting alarm from the towers. There was a giant wooden horse in the middle of the courtyard. The servants told the Duke it had suddenly and mysteriously dropped from the sky. Meanwhile, Don Quixote and Sancho were arguing about the lashes the squire must suffer to free Dulcinea.

"I won't do it," cried the squire.

"For the sake of my lady, I beg you," sobbed the knight.

The Duchess approached them. "You two must cease your squabbling," she said, leading them into the courtyard. She was

enjoying every moment of this grand practical joke she had planned with her husband.

Don Quixote stared up at the wooden horse in amazement.

"What a creature! It must be twenty feet tall!"

Sancho's knees knocked together in fear. There was a rope ladder on the side which they climbed up. Seeing them mount the wooden horse, the Duke and Duchess could hardly control their laughter.

When the two seated themselves on top of the horse, Sancho found there was nothing to hold on to. So he grabbed onto Don Quixote's trouser belt with both hands.

"There is a carving in the wood here!" exclaimed Don Quixote. "It says we have to blindfold ourselves. Anyone who rides this magic horse without a blindfold will be struck dead!" "I've got a handkerchief!" said Sancho.

He pulled out his handkerchief, tore it in two, and gave half to his master. The two fixed the smelly halves of handkerchief around their faces. From a balcony, the Duchess and Duke squealed with pleasure at the sight of the two fools on the horse.

Once their eyes were covered, a servant tapped on the horse, and the servants inside lifted it three feet off the ground and rocked it from side to side.

"We're up in the clouds, Sancho," cried Don Quixote,

"I'm feeling airsick," moaned Sancho.

On a balcony across from the knight and squire, four maidens were pumping a pair of bellows and dousing them with cups of water.

"Hold on, Sancho. We're flying through a rainstorm!" called Don Quixote.

At this point, the Duke and Duchess were laughing their socks off. But they were also beginning to feel guilty for playing such a prank on the good knight. The Duke signaled to his butler for the grand finale.

A servant lit the horse's tail on fire. There was a "POP" and a "FIZZ" as hundreds of fireworks hidden inside the tail exploded. Sancho wrapped his arms around the knight and howled, "Save me, Master. I promise I'll suffer the lashing!"

"All of them?" asked Don Quixote.

"Every one!" cried Sancho.

Then Don Quixote beat the top of the horse with his fist. But this only made the men inside rock it harder. Finally, they tilted it too far, and the wooden horse crashed to the ground. Sancho and the knight were thrown to safety, landing on the soft grass of the castle lawn. Quickly the servants carried the horse away.

By the time Don Quixote and Sancho tore the rags from their eyes, they were facing the Duchess who leaned over them, acting concerned.

"Welcome back," she said softly, "You've been gone for hours. We were so worried. How was the ride?"

Sancho and Don Quixote rested for a few days. Then the knight announced it was time for them to leave.

"But what about Sancho's lashing?" asked the Duchess, who didn't want to miss out on the spectacle.

"He'll have to carry out the lashes while we travel. Life at court is softening my sword arm. It is time for us to go. I thank you for your hospitality."

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza rode away toward the sea and the city of Barcelona.

The next morning, Don Quixote told Sancho, "I want to see you do some whipping right now."

"Don't rush me," cried Sancho, jumping to his feet. "And I prefer to perform my lashing in private."

"I don't care how you do it, but I want to hear each lash so I know you're not shirking."

"Fine," snapped Sancho, "I'll get started."

He grabbed the whip and stomped off into the trees. Then he unbuttoned his shirt and cracked the whip against the trunk of the tree.

"Ow!" he yelled. "That one almost drew blood!"

A few days later, when Don Quixote and Sancho rode into Barcelona, word had already spread of their arrival. The streets were filled with citizens trying to get a glimpse of the crazy yet noble knight. People threw flowers and cheered. The leader of their escort allowed Don Quixote and Sancho to stay in his luxurious villa in the middle of the city.

For two weeks they lived like kings. They were paid daily visits by generals, admirals, and high-ranking public officials.

Each morning, Don Quixote would take Rocinante for a trot along the beach. Then one day, as he was on his morning jaunt, he saw a figure approaching him from down the beach. The figure was a knight, wearing a full suit of armor with his visor lowered. When Don Quixote neared the knight, he could see a white crescent emblem on his chest.

"Halt, the Knight of the Lions!" called the Knight of the White Moon. "I have a challenge for you."

"Don Quixote is always ready for a challenge," the old hidalgo answered bravely.

"Then we will joust," said the strange knight, raising a shiny new lance.

"Name your terms," called Don Quixote.

"If you win, this fine horse and my new lance are yours. If I am the victor, you must retire from your career as a knight-errant."

"Retire?" cried Don Quixote. "But that is impossible."

"We young knights are tired of you getting all of the public's attention. We want you to return to your village for a year and live a peaceful life."

"I accept your terms!" snapped Don Quixote.

Then both knights turned away from each other and checked their weapons. When they turned, the Knight of the White Moon spurred his horse into a gallop and thrust his lance toward Don Quixote.

He held his lance with such precision that the elderly knight didn't have a chance and was thrown from his saddle. He landed in the shallow water and sand of the beach. In a flash, the Knight of the White Moon dismounted and pressed his sword to Don Quixote's neck.

"You are vanquished. Do you concede?" demanded the Knight of the White Moon.

"But it means the end of my life," sobbed Don Quixote. "Without chivalry, I am nothing." "You gave your word," snarled the victor. "I will retire," coughed Don Quixote, "as I promised."

The knight's tears of defeat mixed with the salt water of the waves. "This is the darkest day of all my adventures," he moaned.

But the Knight of the White Moon showed no mercy and rode off on his stallion. The broken hidalgo sat, sobbing in the surf.

Later, Don Quixote hobbled back to town. He never realized that the Knight of the White Moon was actually the youth, Carrasco. In the months since he had been defeated as the Knight of the Forest, he had studied jousting and horsemanship. He was determined to have his revenge on Don Quixote and to return the crazy hidalgo to his friends in the village.

When Sancho heard of Don Quixote's defeat and retirement, he sobbed.

"You can't quit, Sire. Old dogs don't learn new tricks."

"I promised. Now help me take off my armor. I no longer need it."

As the two began their three-day journey home, they lamented their fate.

One night, the two men made camp by a stream. Sancho had been trying to lift the broken-hearted knight's spirits all day.

"Can I do anything to make you feel better?" he asked.

"If I knew my lady was safe," said Don Quixote, "I might be able to smile again."

So Sancho wandered off into the nearby woods and lashed a tree letting out blood-chilling cries with each crack of the whip. When Sancho had lashed all the bark off the tree, Don Quixote told him he had finished a thousand lashes and he stopped for the day.

"I am proud of you," Don Quixote told him warmly. "If you can manage a thousand per night, Dulcinea will be free by the time we reach our village."

They rode hard each day, passing by many sights of past adventures. Each night, Sancho found a suitable tree to whip and rack up another thousand lashes. On the fourth morning, he completed the final two hundred and forty-eight lashes. Don Quixote shook his hand and promised to double his salary if they ever went questing again.

When Don Quixote rode into the courtyard of his home, the housekeeper dropped her basket of laundry in the dust.

"Master, you're back in one piece," she cried.

"I am weak," whispered Don Quixote, "Sancho, help me to my room."

Back in his bed, the old hidalgo slipped into a sleep that lasted for six days. The fever he had gotten grew stronger each day. He cried and moaned in his sleep, as if being haunted by nightmares. Meanwhile, his friends waited patiently by his bedside. After a week, he opened his eyes to see the priest and the barber sitting at the end of his bed.

"I am back," muttered the old knight.

"Don Quixote!" they shouted, rushing to his side.

"My name is Alonso Quixano," said the man in the bed. "I was mad, but now my mind is restored."

"Is it true? Are all your thoughts of chivalry and wizards really gone from your head?" asked the priest.

"They are all gone," he replied softly. "I am sane enough to know that I am dying."

The news that the hidalgo was on his deathbed raced around the village. Sancho came running in from the fields where he had been at work. He was shown into the room and knelt down at his former master's side.

"Perhaps you were a little crazy," Sancho sobbed, "but if you were still a knight, you would not die."

"Your friend who was a knight," replied the hidalgo, "is no longer here. You must forget him."

"I cannot," sobbed the squire.

Sancho tried to convince his old friend not to give up the ghost. But the old hidalgo was overcome with fever. Sancho waited at his bedside for three days until finally, the old knight slipped away.

This was the end of the brave knight, Don Quixote de La Mancha. In his madness, he accomplished feats that ordinary men can only dream of. The stories of his amazing adventures have been told for more than four hundred years.

Rest in peace, noble Don Quixote. May the questing be grand and the adventures bring you glory...

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!