"At last, Sancho," said Don Quixote, "you have put your finger on the thing that can and should turn me from my intended course. As I have told you on a number of occasions, I have no right or obligation to draw my sword against anyone who has not been dubbed a knight. It is up to you, Sancho, to avenge the outrage committed against your dapple, and I shall be right here to shout encouragement and advice."

"Master," said Sancho, "there's no reason for me to take revenge on anyone, for good Christians are supposed to turn the other cheek; moreover, I'll get my jackass to leave his defense up to me, which is to live peaceably for as many days as heaven grants me life."

"Well, if that is your decision, noble Sancho, wise Sancho, Christian and sincere Sancho, let us leave these phantoms and return to the pursuit of better and more worthwhile adventures, for from what I have seen of this land, there must be no end of fabulous ones here."

He then wheeled Rocinante about, Sancho went to retrieve his dapple, and Death and all his fleeing squadron climbed back into the wagon and continued on their way.

Thus did the frightful adventure of the wagon of Death draw to a happy conclusion thanks to the salutary advice Sancho Panza gave his master, who the following day had another adventure with an enamored knight-errant that was no less astounding than this last one.

Chapter Twelve

The strange adventure that befell the valiant Don Quixote and the bold Knight of the Mirrors

After their encounter with Death, Don Quixote and his squire spent the night among some tall shade trees, where at Sancho's urging Don Quixote ate some of the food the dapple was carrying. During the meal, Sancho said to the knight:

"Master, how stupid I would've been to have chosen as my reward the spoils from your grace's first adventure instead of the foals from the three mares! When all is said and done, «a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush»."

"Nevertheless, Sancho," said Don Quixote, "if you had let me attack as I intended, the least spoils you would have received would have been the Empress's gold crown and Cupid's painted wings, which I would have taken by force and placed in your hands."

To which Sancho replied:

"Those scepters and crowns of stage emperors are never pure gold but are plated with tin or brass."

"That is true," said Don Quixote, "for it would not be appropriate for theatrical props to be real but to be make-believe and illusory, as the plays themselves are. Also, Sancho, I would have you dispose yourself favorably toward plays and show every consideration to them as well as to those who act in them and those who write them, for they are all instrumental in performing a great service to the state by placing a mirror before us at every step of the way wherein we may vividly observe the range of human activities. There is nothing that can more faithfully show us what we are and what we ought to be than a play and its actors. Tell me something: have you not seen some play in which they portray kings, emperors, pontiffs, knights, ladies, and sundry other characters—one actor playing the villain, another the trickster, others the merchant, the soldier, the crafty fool, and still another the inexperienced lover, and once the play is over and the actors remove their costumes, they are all reduced to equals?"

"Of course, I have," replied Sancho.

"Well, the same thing," said Don Quixote, "transpires in the drama and events of this world, in which some play the emperors, others the pontiffs, and the rest all the characters that can be represented in a play, but when the end comes, that is, when life has run its course, death strips them of the clothes that made them different, and they all end up equals in the grave."

"An excellent comparison," said Sancho, "though not so novel I haven't heard it many times before, like the one from the game of chess, where each piece during the course of the game plays its particular role, but when the game is over, all the pieces are collected, mixed together, and laid away in a bag, which is like people being laid away in the grave."

"Every day, Sancho," said Don Quixote, "you are becoming less simple-minded and more intelligent."

"Of course I am," replied Sancho, "for some of your grace's intelligence just has to rub off on me. Once a barren, dry piece of land has been fertilized and cultivated, it begins to yield good crops. By this I mean your conversation has been the fertilizer that has fallen over the barren land of my arid mind, and the cultivation is the time I have spent serving your grace. Because of this, I hope to bear fruit that will be a blessing and won't stray or fall from the paths of good breeding that you have brought about in this barren understanding of mine."

Don Quixote laughed at Sancho's affected speech and believed that everything Sancho had said about his improvement was true, for every so often he spoke in a manner that astonished him, though every time or nearly every time he tried to flaunt his learning by speaking in a courtly and professorial manner, his reasoning invariably plunged headlong from the summit of his simplemindedness into the abyss of his ignorance. But where he showed himself most elegant and blessed of memory was in his habit of citing proverbs,

whether or not they bore any relevance to the matter under discussion, as will have been noted and observed in the course of this history.

A large portion of the night was spent in these and other discussions, after which Sancho felt an urge to go looking for the sandman, as he was wont to say when he wanted to go to sleep. But before doing so, he removed the harness from the dapple, allowing him to graze unencumbered on the abundant grass, but he made certain not to remove Rocinante's saddle, for his master had expressly forbidden him to do so during the time they were traveling in the country or sleeping under the open sky, because it was the time-honored custom for knights-errant merely to remove the bridle and drape it over the saddlebow; but to remove the horse's saddle—never! So Sancho did accordingly, giving Rocinante the same freedom he had given the dapple, for Sancho's affection for him and Rocinante was so unparalleled and unwavering that a tradition has been passed down from father to son that the author of this faithful history had composed several chapters specifically about this but had not included them, in order to preserve the dignity and decorum due so heroic a history. Still, there were times when he failed to carry out his intention, and wrote that as soon as the two beasts found themselves alone, they would begin to nuzzle one another until they were tired and satisfied, at which point Rocinante would lay his neck across the dapple's, letting it project more than half a yard on the other side. They would then stand gazing at the ground for three days, or at least for as long as they were left to themselves, or until they were driven by hunger to forage for food. I might add that our author reportedly left an account in which he compared their friendship to that of Nisus and Euryalus, and of Pylades and Orestes.[1] If this is true, it is easy to see, to the wonderment of mankind, how binding the friendship of these two peaceful animals was, a friendship that is a consternation to men, who are quite incapable of maintaining their friendship for one another. Because of this we have the sayings: «a friend in need is a friend indeed», and «a true friend is hard to find». I hope no one will consider the author irresponsible for comparing the friendship of these two animals to that of men, for the latter have been taught many things by beasts and have learned a number of things of importance: for example, from storks the enema, from dogs vomiting and gratitude, from cranes vigilance, from ants foresight, from elephants uprightness, and from horses loyalty.

Sancho finally fell asleep at the foot of a cork tree, while Don Quixote dozed beside a sturdy oak, but very little time had elapsed when the knight was awakened by a noise he heard behind him. Springing to his feet with a start, he directed his eyes and ears toward the spot from where the noise had

1. Nisus and Euryalus, whose friendship was legendary, were from Virgil's *Aeneid,* and the figures Pyles and Orestes were also bosom friends in Greek mythology,

come, at which point he saw two men on horseback, one of whom was easing himself down from his saddle.

"Dismount, my friend," said this rider to the other man, "and unbridle the horses. This place appears to have more than enough grass for the animals, as well as the silence and solitude my amorous thoughts demand."

His saying this and stretching out on the ground were but a single act, and the noise made by the armor when his body hit the ground left no doubt in Don Quixote's mind that this person was a knight-errant. Going over to Sancho, who was already asleep, Don Quixote shook him by the arm and with no little effort managed to rouse him, saying softly:

"Brother Sancho, we have an adventure."

"May God make it a good one," said Sancho, "but where, master, is her grace: this Dame Adventure?"

"Where, Sancho?" replied Don Quixote. "Just look behind you and you will see a knight-errant, stretched out on the ground, who in my opinion cannot be overly happy, for I saw him hurl himself from his horse and slump to the ground in a gesture of despair, and as he fell, even his armor let out a groan."

"And what makes your grace think," said Sancho, "that this is an adventure?"

"I don't claim," said Don Quixote, "that it is a complete one but only the beginning of one, for this is how adventures begin. But listen: he seems to be tuning his lute or guitar, and by the way he is clearing his throat and spitting, he must be preparing to sing something."

"Upon my word, that's it," said Sancho, "and he's probably a knight in love."

"There is not a single knight who is not," replied Don Quixote, "but let us listen. If he does sing, we may by following the thread locate the spool of his thoughts, for 'of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.'"[2]

Sancho was about to respond to his master when he was stopped short by the Knight of the Wood's voice, which was neither very good nor very bad. As they stood listening, they heard him sing the following song:

Bright authoress of my good or ill,
 Prescribe the law I must observe:
My heart, obedient to thy will,
 Shall never from its duty swerve.

If you refuse my griefs to know,
 The stifled anguish seals my fate;

2. A fusion of two passages from the Bible: Matthew 12:34 and Luke 6:45.

But if your ears would drink my woe,
Love shall himself the tale relate.

Though contraries my heart compose,
Hard as the diamond's solid frame,
And soft as yielding wax that flows,
To thee, my fair, 'tis all the same.

Take it, for every stamp prepared,
Imprint what characters you choose,
The faithful tablet, soft or hard,
The dear impression ne'er shall lose.

With a sigh that seemed wrenched from the depths of his soul, the Knight of the Wood brought his song to a close and a moment later said in a voice that was both doleful and sad:

"O most beautiful and most ungrateful woman on earth, how can it be, most serene Casildea of Vandalia, that you will allow this your captive knight to be consumed and unstrung by these continual wanderings and these harsh, cruel ordeals? Is it not sufficient that I have exacted the vow (that you are the most beautiful woman on earth) from all the knights of Navarre, from those of León, Andalusia, Castile, and finally from all the knights of La Mancha?"

"Not so, Sancho," said Don Quixote at this point, "I am from La Mancha and have never made such an admission. I neither could nor would confess anything so prejudicial to my lady's beauty. You can already see, Sancho, that this knight is delirious, but let us listen and perhaps he will make things clear."

"That he'll do," replied Sancho, "for he looks like a person who could lament for a month without stopping."

But that is not what happened, for when the Knight of the Wood overheard them discussing him, he proceeded no further with his lamentations but stood up and said in a resounding but courteous voice:

"Who goes there? Identify yourself. Do you count yourself among the blessed or the afflicted?"

"Among the afflicted," said Don Quixote.

"Then step forward," said the Knight of the Wood, "where you shall find yourself in the presence of sadness and affliction itself."

Don Quixote, who heard himself addressed in such a sensitive and courteous manner, walked over to him, with Sancho right behind him. The mourning knight took Don Quixote by the arm and said:

"Sit down here, sir knight. For me to recognize that your grace is one of those who profess knight-errantry, it is sufficient for me to have found you in

this place where you will be accompanied by solitude and the night air—the natural bed and proper lodging place of knights-errant."

To which Don Quixote responded:

"I am a knight and belong to the profession your grace has mentioned, and though sorrow, misfortune, and adversity have taken up lodging in my breast, the compassion I feel for the misfortunes of others has not for that reason deserted it. From what you have just sung I gather that your misfortunes stem from love, or more precisely from your love of that ungrateful beauty you mentioned in your song of lament."

While this was taking place, they were peaceably and sociably sitting beside one another on the hard ground, as if at day break they were not fated to break each other's head open.

"Sir knight, is it your good fortune to be in love?" the Knight of the Wood asked Don Quixote.

"It is my *mis*fortune to be," replied Don Quixote, "though ills born of well-placed thoughts should be considered blessings rather than misfortunes."

"That is certainly true," said the Knight of the Wood, "so long as being rejected does not upset our reason and understanding, because when there are enough rejections, they seem more like revenge."

"I was never rejected by my lady," said Don Quixote.

"Certainly not," put in Sancho, who was also present, "for my lady's as meek as a lamb and softer than butter."

"Is this your grace's squire," asked the Knight of the Wood.

"Yes, it is," replied Don Quixote.

"I have never met a squire," said the Knight of the Wood, "who would dare speak while his master was speaking; at least, that is true of mine here, who is as big as his father but who, it shall never be charged, has ever opened his lips while I was speaking."

"My word!" said Sancho, "I've spoken and will continue to speak in the presence of anyone who's as big a—but I'll leave it at that, for stirring will only make it worse."

The Squire of the Wood took Sancho by the arm and said to him:

"Why don't we both go where we can have all the squire talk we please, and let these lords and masters of ours have their fill of telling each other the stories of their loves. Without a doubt day will find them still at it and still not through talking."

"Gladly," said Sancho, "and I'll explain to your grace who I am so you can see whether I can hold my own with the most talkative squires around."

With this, the squires went off to themselves, where they took part in a discussion that was just as comical as their masters' was serious.