

## Chapter 12

*Regarding what a goatherd recounted to those who were with Don Quixote*

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At this moment another young man approached, one of those who brought the goatherds provisions from the village, and he said:

“Friends, do you know what has happened in town?”

“How could we know?” one replied.

“Well, then, I’ll tell you,” the young man continued. “This morning the famous student shepherd named Grisóstomo died, and they say he died of love for that accursed girl Marcela, the daughter of Guillermo the rich man, the same girl who dresses up like a shepherdess and wanders around the wild, empty places.”

“Marcela, did you say?” asked one of them.

“The same,” replied the goatherd. “And the strange thing is that in his will he said he wanted to be buried in the countryside, like a Moor, and that his grave should be at the bottom of the rocky hill where the spring at the cork tree is, because everybody knows, and they say he said so himself, that this is where he saw her for the first time. And he also asked for some other things that the abbots in the village say shouldn’t be done, that it isn’t right to do them because they seem heathenish. And to all of this that great friend of his, Ambrosio, the student who dresses up like a shepherd, too, says that everything Grisóstomo wanted has to be done just the way he asked, with nothing left out, and the whole village is in an uproar over this, but people are saying that in the end, they’ll do what Ambrosio and his shepherd friends want; tomorrow they’ll come to bury him with great ceremony in the place I said, and I think it will be something worth seeing; at least, I’ll be sure to go and see it, even though I’m supposed to go back to town tomorrow.”

“We’ll all do the same,” the goatherds responded, “and we’ll draw straws to see who has to stay behind and watch all the goats.”

“Good idea, Pedro,” said one, “but you won’t have to draw straws; I’ll stay here for all of you. And don’t think it’s because I’m good or not very curious, it’s just that the sharp branch I stepped on the other day makes it hard for me to walk.”

“Even so, we all thank you,” Pedro replied.

And Don Quixote asked Pedro to tell him about the dead man and the shepherdess, to which Pedro responded that all he knew was that the

dead man was a rich gentleman, a resident of a nearby village, who had been a student in Salamanca for many years and then had returned home with a reputation for being very learned and well-read.

“Mainly people said he knew the science of the stars and what happens up there in the sky with the sun and the moon, because he would always tell us when there’d be a clips of the sun and the moon.”

“It is called an *eclipse*, my friend, not a clips, when those two great heavenly bodies darken,” said Don Quixote.

But Pedro, paying little attention to such trifles, continued with his story, saying:

“And he also could tell when the land would produce and when it would be bairn.”

“You mean *barren*, my friend,” said Don Quixote.

“*Barren* or *bairn*,” responded Pedro, “it’s all the same in the end. And what I’m saying is that because of what he told them, his father and his friends, who believed him, became very rich because they listened when he said: ‘This year plant barley, not wheat; and this year you can plant chickpeas and not barley; next year there’ll be a good olive oil harvest, but for the next three you won’t get a drop.’”

“This science is called astrology,” said Don Quixote.

“I don’t know what it’s called,” Pedro replied, “but I do know he knew all that, and even more. Finally, not many months after he came home from Salamanca, he suddenly appeared one day dressed like a shepherd, with a staff and sheepskin jacket instead of the long gown he wore as a scholar, and a close friend of his named Ambrosio, who had studied with him in Salamanca, dressed up like a shepherd, too. I forgot to say that Orisostomo, the dead man, was a great one for writing verses; in fact, he wrote the carols for the night of Our Lord’s Birth, and the plays for Corpus Christi that the lads from our village put on, and everybody said they were wonderful. When the people in the village saw the two scholars suddenly dressed like shepherds, they were really surprised and couldn’t guess the reason why they’d made so odd a change. At about this time his father died, and Grisóstomo inherited a big estate, goods as well as lands, no small amount of livestock both large and small, and a large amount of

money; the boy became lord and master of all of this, and the truth is he deserved it all, for he was a very good companion and a charitable man and a friend of good people, and his face was like a blessing. Later on, people began to understand that the change in the way he dressed had been for no other reason than to go wandering through these wild places, following after that shepherdess Marcela our lad mentioned before, because our poor dead Grisóstomo had fallen in love with her. And I want to tell you now who this girl is, because you ought to know; maybe, and maybe there's no maybe about it, you won't hear anything like it in all your born days, even if you live to be as old as my mouth sores."

"You mean *Methuselah*," replied Don Quixote, unable to tolerate the goatherd's confusion of words.

"My mouth sores last a good long time," Pedro responded, "and if, Señor, you keep correcting every word I say, we won't finish in a year."

"Forgive me, my friend," said Don Quixote. "I mentioned it only because there is such a great difference between *ray mouth sores* and *Methuselah*; but you answered very well, since *my mouth sores* live longer than *Methuselah*; go on with your story, and I shall not contradict you again in anything."

"Well, Señor, as I was saying," said the goatherd, "in our village there was a farmer even richer than Grisóstomo's father, and his name was Guillermo, and God gave him not only great wealth but also a daughter, whose mother died giving birth to her, and her mother was the most respected woman in this whole district. It seems to me I can see her now, with that face of hers shining like the sun on one side and the moon on the other; more than anything else, she was a hardworking friend to the poor, and for this reason I believe that right this minute her spirit is enjoying God in the next world. Her husband, Guillermo, died of grief at the death of such a good woman, and their daughter, Marcela, was left a very rich girl, in the care of an uncle who was a priest, the vicar of our village. The girl grew, and her beauty reminded us of her mother's, which was very great, though people thought the daughter's would be even greater. And it was, for when she reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, no man could look at her and not bless God for making her so beautiful, and most fell madly in love with her. Her uncle kept her carefully and modestly secluded, but even so, word of her great beauty spread so that for her own sake, and because of her great fortune, not only the men of our village but those for many miles around, the best among them, asked,

begged, and implored her uncle for her hand in marriage. But he, a good and honest Christian, though he wanted to arrange her marriage as soon as she was of age, didn't want to do it without her consent, and didn't even care about the profit and gain from the girl's estate that he would enjoy if he delayed her marriage. And by my faith, there was many a gossip in the village who said this in praise of the good priest. For I want you to know, Señor Knight, that in these small hamlets people talk and gossip about everything, and you can be sure, as I am, that a priest must be better than good if his parishioners have to speak well of him, especially in a village."

"That is true," said Don Quixote, "and please continue; the story is very good, and you, my good Pedro, tell it with a good deal of grace."

"May God's grace be with me, that's the one that matters. As for the rest, you should know that even though the uncle suggested names to his niece, and told her the qualities of each of the many suitors begging for her hand, and asked her to choose and marry a man she liked, she never said anything except that she didn't want to marry just then, and since she was so young she didn't feel able to bear the burdens of matrimony. Hearing these excuses, which seemed so reasonable, the uncle stopped asking and waited for her to get a little older, when she would be able to choose a husband she liked. Because he said, and rightly so, that parents shouldn't force their children into marriage against their will.

But then one day, to everybody's surprise, the finicky Marcela appeared dressed like a shepherdess, and paying no attention to her uncle or to all the villagers, who warned her not to do it, she started to go out to the countryside with the other shepherdesses and to watch over her own flock. And as soon as she appeared in public and her beauty was seen in the open, I can't tell you how many rich young men, noblemen and farmers, began to dress up like Grisóstomo and to court her in these fields. One of them, as I've said, was our dead man, who, people said, had stopped loving her and begun to worship her. And don't think that just because Marcela took on the liberty of a life that's so free, with so little seclusion, or none at all, she gave any sign or suggestion that would damage her modesty and virtue; instead, she watches over her honor with so much vigilance that of all the men who woo and court her, not one has boasted or could truthfully claim that she's given him any hope of achieving his desire. For though she doesn't run from or avoid the company and conversation of the shepherds, and treats them with

courtesy and friendship, if any of them reveals his desire to her, even one as honest and holy as matrimony, she hurls it away from her like a stone in a catapult. And by living this way, she does more harm in this land than the plague, because her affability and beauty attract the hearts of those who try to woo her and love her, but her disdain and reproaches drive them to despair so that they don't know what to say about her except to call her cruel and ungrateful and other names that plainly show the nature of her disposition. And if you spent one day here, Señor, you'd hear these mountains and valleys echoing with the lamentations of the disappointed men who follow her.

Not very far from here is a place where there are almost two dozen tall beech trees, and there's not one that doesn't have the name of Marcela carved and written on its smooth bark, and at the top of some there's a crown carved into the tree, as if the lover were saying even more clearly that Marcela wears and deserves the crown more than any other human beauty. Here a shepherd sighs, there another moans, over yonder amorous songs are heard, and farther on desperate lamentations. One spends all the hours of the night sitting at the foot of an oak tree or a rocky crag, not closing his weeping eyes, and the sun finds him in the morning absorbed and lost in his thoughts; another gives no respite or rest to his sighs, and in the middle of the burning heat of the fiercest summer afternoon, lying on the burning sand, he sends his complaints up to merciful heaven. And over this one, that one, and all of them, the beautiful Marcela, free and self-assured, triumphs, and those of us who know her are waiting to see where her haughtiness will end and who will be the fortunate man to conquer so difficult a nature and enjoy such extreme beauty.

Since everything I've told you is the absolute truth, I take it for granted that what our lad said about what people were saying about the reason for Gristóstomo's death is also true. And so my advice, Señor, is that tomorrow you be sure to attend his burial, which will be something worth seeing, because Grisóstomo has a lot of friends, and it's no more than half a league from here to the place where he wanted to be buried."

"I shall be certain to," said Don Quixote, "and I thank you for the pleasure you have given me with the narration of so delightful a story."

"Oh!" replied the goatherd. "I still don't know the half of what's happened to the lovers of Marcela, but it may be that tomorrow we'll meet some shepherd on the way who'll tell us about them. For now, it

would be a good idea if you slept under a roof, because the night air might hurt your wound, though the medicine you've put on it is so good there's no reason to fear any trouble."

Sancho Panza, who by this time was cursing the goatherd's endless talk, also asked his master to go into Pedro's hut to sleep. He did so, and spent the rest of the night thinking of his lady Dulcinea, in imitation of Marcela's lovers. Sancho Panza settled down between Rocinante and his donkey and slept, not like a scorned lover, but like a man who had been kicked and bruised.