

Pursuing Dulcinea

Something to Think About

One of the greatest stories in the Spanish writer Cervantes's great novel, *Don Quixote*, concerns the relationship between Don Quixote and the woman Aldonza. God is like Don Quixote. We are Aldonza. God is Quixote who loves us relentlessly.

Aldonza is a waitress who serves drunken roughnecks during daylight. She takes care of them in other ways at night. Quixote, The Man of La Mancha, sees something else in this common hooker and barfly, something no one else has ever seen. He sees something Aldonza has certainly never seen in herself. Quixote sees a beauty of spirit and heart that has escaped the eyes of everyone else.

"My Lady," he calls her softly.

She looks at him, trying to hear the mockery, looking for the sneer and sees none. "Lady?"

"Yes, you are my Lady, and I will give you a new name. I will call you Dulcinea."

Later Aldonza-Dulcinea suffers one of the most hideous humiliations possible — she is raped. Don Quixote finds her. He had almost convinced her of her worth. The light was in her eyes; she would have believed in herself for the first time in her life, if not for this.... Quixote looks into her battered face. Her clothing is shredded; she is hysterical and beyond comfort.

"My Lady, Dulcinea, oh, my Lady, my Lady."

"Don't call me Lady," she cries. "Oh, God, don't call me a Lady. Can't you see me for what I am? I was born in a ditch by a mother who left me there naked and cold — too hungry to cry. I never blamed her. She left me there hoping I'd have the good sense to die. Don't call me Lady ... I'm nothing at all."

She flees into the night from the man who loves her, while he calls after her, "But ... you *are* my Lady."

The Man of La Mancha spends his life as a service to her, seeking the one he loves. To no avail. But, at the end, as he is dying from a broken heart, despised, misunderstood, and an outcast, a Spanish queen suddenly appears at his bedside.

Quietly, she kneels beside his bed and prays. He opens his weary, weak eyes and asks, "Who are you?"

"My Lord, don't you remember? You sang a song, don't you remember? 'To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear the unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go....' My Lord, don't you remember? You gave me a new name, you called me Dulcinea." She stands with the bearing of a queen and says, "I am your Lady."