

The Enchanted Mule

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Portuguese

Advanced
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There was once a very merry, but very poor hostler in Salamanca. He was so poor that he had to go about his business in rags; and one day when he was attending on the richly caparisoned mule belonging to the Archbishop of Toledo, he gave vent to his feelings in words.

“Ah,” said he, “my father was always called a donkey from the day of his marriage; but would to goodness I were the archbishop’s mule! Look at the rich livery he bears; look at his stout sides; see how he drinks up his wine and eats his maize bread! Oh, it would be a merry life, indeed! My father was, they say, an ass, so I would be a mule!”

And then he leant against the manger, and laughed so heartily that the archbishop’s mule stopped eating to look at him.

“What ho!” said the mule. “Remember that my reverend master, being a corpulent man, is somewhat heavy; but if thou wilt change conditions with me, thou need but take hold of both my ears, and, caramba, a mule thou shalt be, and that in the service of the Archbishop of Toledo!”

“And that will I,” answered Pablo the hostler; “for better be a well-fed mule than a starving hostler.” So saying, he seized the mule by the ears, and, looking at him in the face, he was immediately transformed; but, to his surprise, he saw that the quondam mule was changed into a monk. “How now!” cried he. “Wilt thou not bring me some more wine and maize bread, sir monk? Wilt thou not be my hostler?”

But the monk turned away and left the stable, and Pablo then saw that he had made a mistake. But he resolved that as soon as he was led out into the street he would run off to his old mother, and implore her to intercede on his behalf with the patron St. James of Compostella.

When the archbishop had rested, he called for his mule, which was brought out; and, in the absence of the hostler, whom they could not find, one of the attendants was about tightening the girths, when the mule Pablo, seizing the opportunity, bolted away as hard as he could down the road in the direction of his mother’s house.

The archbishop thought his mule had gone mad, and as the servants followed it, running, and crying out, “Stop the beast—stop it!” the rabble joined in the chase; but Pablo never stopped till he got to his mother’s house.

The old woman was at the door, spinning at her distaff, and as she was very deaf she had not heard the clamour. Pablo, bending over her, tried to kiss her hand, to ask her for her blessing, but his tongue now failed him. So frightened was she at the approach of the animal that she hit him over the head with her distaff, and cried out, “Abernuncio!”

By this time the servants had surrounded him, and were trying to lead him back, but he would not go. He stood on his hind-legs, and then lay down on his side, and rolled in the dust till the scarlet saddle-cloth was spoilt, and then, suddenly rising, rushed into the cottage, and tried to sit on his accustomed chair.

His mother fled the house, and the rabble entered, and so cudgelled Pablo that he was fain to return to the inn; and, after being groomed, he allowed the archbishop to mount him. However, he had not gone far before he exclaimed, “By St. Iago, this mule hath the pace of a camel!” Pablo, not being accustomed to four legs, did not know how to use them, so that he would move his right fore and hind legs together. This caused the archbishop great inconvenience, for, being a corpulent man, it made him roll about on the saddle like the gold ball on the cathedral of Sevilla, when the west wind loosened it, and the east wind blew it down.

Seizing the pommel with both his hands, and raising himself in his shoe stirrups, he looked as if he intended to vault over the head of the mule; and as they were at this moment going through a village, the inhabitants, who

had come out to see the archbishop, thought he was about to deliver a sermon. So, surrounding the mule, they uncovered their heads, and knelt awaiting the blessing.

Pablo, forgetting he was a mule, thought the people were doing homage to him, and being of a merry disposition, he gave way to such inward laughter that it brought on a violent fit of coughing, which the faithful—not seeing the face of the archbishop, for they devoutly bent their heads towards the ground—took to be the natural clearing of the throat before speaking. But the archbishop, who was now becoming seriously frightened, and thinking that the evil one had entered the body of his mule, exclaimed, “Exorciso te—abernuncio!” Then did Pablo sit down on his hind-quarters, so that the archbishop slid off the saddle and rolled on the ground, and another “Abernuncio!” in a deeper tone, brought the devout people to their feet. Pablo at this moment got up, and by so doing completely capsized the venerable archbishop, causing him to turn over on to his head. Full of dust and anger, the prelate started to his feet, and carefully examined his mule to see if he could account for this peculiar behaviour. Sorely grieved did Pablo feel at having caused the good archbishop so much annoyance, and, so as to show his contrition, he went down on his fore-legs, thinking to kneel, which so frightened all the people that they instinctively took shelter behind the archbishop. But he was as much afraid as the rest, and had it not been that they held him by his robes, he would have run away.

“This beats the mule of Merida,” cried one, “who ran away with the miller’s wife and then regretted the bargain. See, he is craving for pardon.”

Pablo the mule rose after kneeling for some time, and, after the fashion of trained animals of this breed, he extended his fore and hind-legs, so as to facilitate the archbishop mounting him, which he soon did, feeling convinced that the mule had intended no harm; but Pablo, regretting his mistake and the loss of time it had caused, set off at a quick amble, which so disconcerted his rider that he had to hold on by the pommel and the crupper; and thus he was hurried out of the village, and the people were done out of the blessing.

The attendants, who were on foot, tried to keep up with Pablo; but this they could not do, owing to his long strides; and not until they were within sight of Toledo did they get up to their master, who, by this time, was out of breath and countenance. They, fearing that the mule might start off again, placed a man on each side holding the reins, and thus did they approach the eastern gate of the city, at which many priests were waiting with the cross and the sword of the archbishop, in order to give him a fitting welcome, according to the rules of the Church. Pablo, seeing the large silver cross, the emblem of Christianity, slackened his pace, and when within a few yards of it, in obedience to what his mother had taught him as a child, dropped down on his

knees, bending his head to the ground; but this he did so suddenly, that the archbishop fell off the saddle on to his neck, and, to break his fall, caught hold of his servants by their ears, nearly tearing them off, and causing them also to tumble. Thinking that the evil one had seized them, they struck out right and left, and nearly stunned their master with the blows and kicks. Pablo, hoping to retrieve his fortune, started to his legs with the archbishop clinging round his neck, and galloped after the two servants with his mouth open, so that, should he catch them, he might bite them. But they, surmising what he meant, sought refuge among the priests, and these in their turn made haste to get into a small chapel close by.

“Our archbishop must have changed mules with Beelzebub,” said a fat priest, “for no earthly animal would thus treat a prince of the Church!”

“Ay,” continued one of the runaway servants; “and if his neck had been a foot longer I should have been dangling in mid-air like the coffin of the false prophet.”

“I never thought to have run so fast again,” ejaculated a very short and stout priest. “Faith, my legs seemed to grow under me, as our sacristan said after he had been tossed by the abbot’s bull.”

“But what has become of the archbishop?” said another. “We must not leave him in his sorry plight.”

Saying this, he carefully opened the door of the chapel, and there they saw their prelate swooning on the pavement, and Pablo dashing full tilt among the crowd, trying to wreak his vengeance on as many as he could possibly get hold of.

Having torn the leather breeches of some half-dozen sightseers, and knocked down and trampled on some score of men and women, he rushed out of the city by the same gate, and never stopped till he arrived at the inn where he had been hostler. The master of the inn, thinking that some mishap had befallen the archbishop, made haste to secure the mule; but as it was already night, he postponed sending off one of his servants till next morning.

Once again at the manger, Pablo had time to consider over the mistake he had made, and he would gladly have undergone any punishment, could he but have regained his former shape.

While he was thus musing, he saw the monk approaching, looking very sorrowful indeed.

“Pablo,” said he, “how dost thou like being a mule?”

Now, Pablo was cunning, and, not wishing to let the monk know what had happened, he answered—

“As for liking it, I enjoyed carrying the archbishop as much as he liked being carried; but I am not accustomed to such gay trappings and good living, so that I am afraid of injuring my health.”

“If that be the case,” continued the monk, “hold down thy head, and I will relieve thee of the danger; for, to tell you the truth, I find out that my wife is still living, and she recognized me although I was disguised as a monk. By my faith, I would rather bear my master’s harness to the grave than my wife’s tongue from morning till night! Caramba, I hear her knocking at the door! Dear Pablo, let us again exchange conditions.”

And Pablo, when he awoke next morning, was tightly grasping a beam, thinking he was the Archbishop of Toledo clinging on to the mule’s neck.

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