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# The Quest for Don Quixote

By

MARK BROWN

Inspired by the novel

*The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha* by

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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# The Quest for Don Quixote

## CHARACTERS

Actor #1: Ben, Horseman #1, Sanson Carrasco, Knight of the Wood, Devil

Actor #2: Jeffry, Innkeeper, Horseman #2, Mambrino Barber, Fernando, Squire of the Wood, Duke of Tierra Malvados

Actor #3: Don Quixote

Actor #4: Barista, Housekeeper, Horseman #3, Crapbeater, Innkeeper's Wife, Shepherd, Domingo, Marge, Duchess of Tierra Malvados

Actor #5: Antonia, Death Horseman, Crapbeater, Maritornes, Shepherd, Princess Micomicona, Not Dulcinea, Dulcinea

Actor #6: Overweight Man, Sancho Panza

# The Quest for Don Quixote

## ACT I

AT RISE: *Lights up. The inside of a Starbucks. Perhaps there's a large screen upstage suggesting windows.*

*(A BARISTA is behind the bar making a drink. A WOMAN sits reading a book. A slightly OVERWEIGHT MAN is reading a comic book, his back to the audience.)*

*At another table sits BEN. A vintage typewriter and an empty grande Starbucks cup sit on the table. The floor is covered with crumpled pieces of paper. He's a poster child for desperation and anxiety. He rips a piece of paper out of the typewriter, crumples it up and tosses it to the ground. He puts another piece of paper in the typewriter.)*

BEN (*typing*). Act one. Darkness. Voice-over. “In a village of La Mancha”—Hmm—Spanish accent— (*He does a Spanish accent.*) “In a village of La Mancha”—Female. (*He does a female Spanish accent.*) “In a village of La Mancha”—ew. (*Back to the male Spanish accent.*) “In a village of La Mancha lived a gentleman.”

*(Lights come up behind the upstage screen, and we see the shadow of the quintessential image of DON QUIXOTE.)*

BEN (*cont'd*). “In a village of La Mancha lived a gaunt gentleman. A gaunt and lanky gentleman. Gaunt and lean. Gaunt and cadaverous. In a village of La Mancha lived a gentleman—he got cancer and died. Curtain.”

*(BEN collapses on the typewriter.*

*Lights out on QUIXOTE.)*

BARISTA. Isabel. Grande skinny Cinnamon Dolce Latte on the bar.

*(She places the drink on the bar. The WOMAN gets up to get her drink.*

*JEFFRY SCHATZMAN, BEN's agent, enters.)*

JEFFRY. Finally.

BEN. Oh crap.

*(As the WOMAN reaches for cream to put in her drink, JEFFRY grabs the coffee from the bar. The coffee isn't his, but he doesn't care.)*

JEFFRY. Do you know how many Starbucks I had to go to before I found you?

*(The WOMAN sees her drink is gone, and the BARISTA motions that she'll make another one for her.)*

BEN. Is that rhetorical or do you want me to try and—

JEFFRY. Fifty-two. Why can't you go to the same one every day?

BEN. I'm hiding from you.

JEFFRY. I haven't spent this much time looking for someone since I had to hunt down Betty White after her all-night bender with Lil Wayne. Don't ask.

*(JEFFRY sees the old typewriter.)*

JEFFRY *(cont'd)*. Did your computer break?

BEN. No.

JEFFRY. How very Arthur Miller of you, but isn't a computer easier?

BEN. Yes, but with a computer if I write something crappy I just delete it. With a typewriter when I write something crappy, I get the satisfaction of being able to do this.

*(He yanks the paper out, crumbles it and throws it on the floor.*

*JEFFRY notices the pile of crumpled paper.)*

JEFFRY. It's going well I see.

BEN. It's impossible.

JEFFRY. I'm sure it's great.

BEN. Well you'd be wrong.

JEFFRY. It can't be that bad.

BEN. Yes it can because it can't be adapted.

JEFFRY. There's nothing that can't be adapted.

BEN. It'd be easier to adapt the receipt for my coffee than this book. But I join an illustrious group of failures who have attempted it—Terry Gilliam, Orson Welles—

JEFFRY. Welles always looked like he smelled. And not like the cologne counter at Saks.

BEN. I thought I could do it. I thought—you know, I'm better than those guys, I can do it. I can adapt this massive novel that, by the by, no one has ever read—have you read it?

JEFFRY. I can barely finish my horoscope.

BEN. No one has read it. No one. So of course everyone thinks they know it. But they don't. I really thought I could do it but I failed. Failed. Failed. Failed.

JEFFRY. OK, who at this table needs a handful of Xanax?

*(He pours enough Xanax pills to knock out an overwrought giant forest hog onto the table.)*

BEN. Someone wrote, “Like the character himself, those who try to dramatize the Spanish classic are tilting at windmills.”

JEFFRY. They made *Man of La Mancha*.

*(The mere mention of Man of La Mancha sends BEN into a rage.)*

BEN. *Man of La Mancha* is not *Don Quixote*. Everyone thinks it’s *Don Quixote* but it’s not *Don Quixote*. *Man of La Mancha* is barely the first fifty pages of a thousand page—*(He holds up a dog-eared copy of the book.)* A one thousand page book! First off, *La Mancha* is a play within a play. Coward’s way out. Secondly, there’s no Inquisition in the book. There’s no play in a prison. Dulcinea isn’t even in the book. Did you know that? Don Quixote’s love interest? The big romance of *Man of La Mancha*. Oh sure they talk about Dulcinea all the time but she doesn’t physically appear in the book. She’s like the balloon in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. It’s not in the book but it’s in the movie so everyone thinks it’s in the book.

JEFFRY *(fearful to ask)*. Is the windmill in the book?

BEN. The windmill? Oh let me show you the famous windmill scene. *(He flips through the book.)* Chapter eight. Page forty-two. Quixote sees a bunch of windmills, thinks they’re monsters, he attacks one, his lance breaks, he falls on the ground aaaaaand scene. *(He rips the page out.)* One page. One page. Glad that’s in there. Now I only have nine hundred and ninety-eight more pages to adapt. *(He crumples up the page and throws it on the ground.)*

JEFFRY. Nine hundred ninety-nine. There was something on the other side.

BEN. Probably a scene where Quixote and Sancho get beat up. That’s all that happens to them. Every chapter. They

get beat up. They're bleeding. They're puking. It's like Quentin Tarantino wrote it. I thought I could do it but I am a monumental failure. *(He collapses.)*

JEFFRY. OK, first off, you need to cut down on your caffeine. And I mean way down. Secondly, you're worrying too much. That's my job. I'm a Jew, it's genetic.

BEN. No, you don't understand. I've discovered a new level of hell and it's adapting this stupid book.

JEFFRY *(pulls out his phone to text BEN)*. I'm texting you the number of my shrink. Called me a nutcase within the first five minutes of meeting me, but he's cheap. Look, don't worry. The theatre is going to love it.

BEN. I've missed my deadline.

JEFFRY. Three times. But who's counting? Extensions are good. Lets you hone the play. They'll start rehearsal tomorrow with a well-crafted tight script. And I know we'll have a hit.

BEN. You left out the first "s" in hit.

JEFFRY. I'll run it over to the theatre tonight. Did you make a copy?

BEN. No.

JEFFRY. Fine I'll take the original.

*(BEN doesn't move.)*

JEFFRY *(cont'd)*. You have it, right?

*(Silence.)*

*JEFFRY gets serious.)*

JEFFRY *(cont'd)*. Don't kid me.

*(Silence.)*

JEFFRY *(cont'd)*. Tell me you have something.

*(BEN picks up a crumpled page and uncrumples it.)*

BEN *(reading. Very dramatic)*. Act one. Darkness. Voice-over. *(Spanish accent.)* “In a village of La Mancha lived a gentleman.”

*(Lights slowly up on the shadow of QUIXOTE.)*

*Silence.*

*JEFFRY takes the page and looks at it.)*

JEFFRY. That’s it?

*(BEN nods.)*

*Lights out on QUIXOTE.*

*JEFFRY crumbles the page up and throws it on the ground.)*

BEN. Cathartic, isn’t it?

JEFFRY. I thought you were working on the final scene, not the opening ten seconds. And that’s not a Spanish accent. That’s Eastern European.

BEN. I’m not an actor.

JEFFRY. They start rehearsal tomorrow. Tomorrow. If we don’t hand them a script, you’re done.

BEN. Why didn’t you say something before?

JEFFRY. I thought you were—you know—actually writing something. Oh my god. Do you hear that sound? The fan is on and the shit is swinging into place. Oh god. We’ll have to give back the advance.

BEN. Can't. Spent it.

JEFFRY. On what?

BEN. It's an antique typewriter.

JEFFRY. Oh my god!

BEN. Ian Fleming wrote *Casino Royale* on it.

JEFFRY. *Casino Royale* made money! (*Panicking.*) OK, let's not panic.

(*JEFFRY frantically picks up the Xanax and swallows them.*)

BEN. How about you pay back the advance.

JEFFRY. I don't have any money. I have to support my mother. She gave her life savings to an exiled Nigerian Prince.

BEN. I'll pay you back when I sell my next script.

JEFFRY. You haven't written a new script in years.

(*BEN crumbles.*)

JEFFRY (*cont'd*). I'm sorry. The Xanax hasn't reached my stomach yet.

BEN. No, you're right. I am the ultimate anti-achiever.

JEFFRY. My god, you and my mother should live together.

OK, OK. We are not going to wallow in my people's genetic make-up. We are going to do this.

BEN. Do what?

JEFFRY. Give them a finished script tomorrow.

BEN. You want to adapt *Don Quixote* in one day?

JEFFRY. Yes. (*To the BARISTA.*) I need a venti caramel snickerdoodle macchiato with six shots of espresso. (*Back to BEN.*) OK, let's go.

BEN. You're serious?

JEFFRY. As my third heart attack. And I can feel number four coming on. Get out your notes, whatever you have.

BEN. Now we're both tilting at windmills.

JEFFRY (*making a scene*). Get out your goddamn notes before I make a scene!

BEN. Too late.

JEFFRY (*to the people in Starbucks*). Sorry. I was weened on Judy Garland films. (*Imitating Judy*.) "It's lonely and cold on the top—lonely and cold." Let's go.

BEN. I can't.

JEFFRY. You have to.

BEN. I know, but I can't. I can't do anything. This is the first time I've been out of bed in three months.

JEFFRY. Well you should be well rested.

BEN. God I wish. I spend all night worrying about everything and then I sleep the day away, wishing I could just disappear.

JEFFRY. I felt that way at my first prom. Look, anxiety is good for writers.

BEN. Not me. It paralyzes me. I can't write. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I can't function like a normal human being. I'm scared to death of failure, of criticism. I can't—I just can't.

JEFFRY. I hate to be trite, even though it serves me well at family reunions, but everyone fails. Look around you. Everyone here has failed. That barista fails every day at becoming a working actress. I fail every day. Hard to believe I know, but here's my secret at dealing with failure. If at first I don't succeed, I destroy all evidence that I even tried.

BEN. It's just all so daunting.

JEFFRY. Yes, it's an abnormally long book.

BEN. Not the book. Well yes the book. But life. It's just—

JEFFRY. Yes life is stupid and short and it sucks but then you get the semi-annual sale at Nordstrom's and it all seems worthwhile. Man is not made for defeat, despite what my mother says. Now let's go.

*(BEN doesn't move.)*

JEFFRY *(cont'd)*. As much as I want to kill you right now, we're in this together. That's also exactly what my mother said to my father right after she said, "I do."

BEN. OK.

JEFFRY. That's it. Here we go.

BEN *(typing)*. OK. Act one. Darkness. Voice-over.

JEFFRY. Narrator. Audiences like to see someone.

BEN. Voice-over saves the theatre money.

JEFFRY. And maybe they can all dress in black and save on costumes.

BEN. I don't think that's a good—

JEFFRY. I was being sarcastic. My people call it bitchy. Make it a narrator. It's theatre. It's live. Not a pre-recorded theme park show.

BEN *(typing)*. Act one. Darkness. Narrator—In a village of La Mancha—I need to put in lights up—

JEFFRY. Oh my god you're OCD. They'll figure it out. Just keep going.

BEN. Act one. Darkness. Narrator. *(Under his breath.)* — Lights up somewhere— *(Back to full voice.)* In a village of La Mancha lived a gentleman.

*(Lights slowly come up on QUIXOTE.)*

JEFFRY. Can you zazz it up? Make it more adventury? You gotta grab the audience.

BEN. Um—"The legend begins, as all legends do, with humble beginnings."

JEFFRY. That's good. See? You've still got it.

BEN. Deep in the heart of Spain, in a village of La Mancha, lives a gaunt and shriveled-limb man by the name of Señor Alonso Quixana.

JEFFRY. Beautiful.

BEN. And then I get stuck.

*(Lights out on QUIXOTE.)*

JEFFRY *(to the BARISTA)*. Make that eight shots. *(Trying to stay positive.)* OK. You've got a solid ten seconds.

BEN. That's all I've got. Oh my god, it's unbearable.

JEFFRY. So is poverty.

BEN. I don't care about the money.

JEFFRY. Which is why you'd be a lousy agent. OK. Here's what we'll do. Just tell me the story. In your own words. Preferably in small words so I can understand it.

BEN. OK. So this gaunt and shriveled-limb—what about gaunt and lean?

JEFFRY. Gaunt and shriveled-limb! Go with gaunt and shriveled-limb!

BEN. OK, so this gaunt and shriveled-limb guy named Alonso Quixana—

*(Lights up on QUIXOTE no longer behind the screen.)*

BEN *(cont'd)*. Lives a quiet and private life with his housekeeper—

*(The BARISTA becomes the HOUSEKEEPER.)*

BEN *(cont'd)*. And his niece.

*(The WOMAN reading the book becomes the niece, ANTONIA.)*

BEN (*cont'd*). Quixana spends his time immersed in books about chivalric knights in shining armor.

JEFFRY. I'm bored already. Have the characters talk to the narrator.

HOUSEKEEPER. That's a great idea.

BEN. Wait. What?

ANTONIA. Have the characters talk to the narrator.

BEN. Why would you talk to the narrator?

ANTONIA. Because we're breaking the fifth wall.

BEN. The fourth wall.

ANTONIA. No, the fifth wall.

BEN. There's no fifth wall.

ANTONIA. Yes there is.

BEN. What the hell is the fifth wall?

HOUSEKEEPER. The fourth wall is between the actors and the audience. The fifth wall is between the actors, audience and the playwright.

BEN. There isn't a playwright in the play.

ALL (*even the OVERWEIGHT MAN*). Put yourself in the play.

BEN. Why would I do that?

ANTONIA. It's interesting.

HOUSEKEEPER. It's unexpected.

ANTONIA. And you can comment on how impossible it is to adapt the book.

JEFFRY. Unexpected and you get to bitch? I'm in heaven.

BEN. OK. OK. But I'm not happy about it.

HOUSEKEEPER. Thatta boy.

BEN. So am I the narrator or the playwright?

JEFFRY. Both. You're the playwright narrating the play.