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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LIFE IS A DREAM ***

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LIFE IS A DREAM

By Pedro Calderon De La Barca

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Pedro Calderon de la Barca was born in Madrid, January 17, 1600, of good family. He was educated at the Jesuit College in Madrid and at the University of Salamanca; and a doubtful tradition says that he began to write plays at the age of thirteen. His literary activity was interrupted for ten years, 1625-1635, by military service in Italy and the Low Countries, and again for a year or more in Catalonia. In 1637

he became a Knight of the Order of Santiago, and in 1651 he entered the priesthood, rising to the dignity of Superior of the Brotherhood of San Pedro in Madrid. He held various offices in the court of Philip IV, who rewarded his services with pensions, and had his plays produced with great splendor. He died May 5, 1681.

At the time when Calderon began to compose for the stage, the Spanish drama was at its height. Lope de Vega, the most prolific and, with Calderon, the greatest, of Spanish dramatists, was still alive; and by his applause gave encouragement to the beginner whose fame was to rival his own. The national type of drama which Lope had established was maintained in its essential characteristics by Calderon, and he produced abundant specimens of all its varieties. Of regular plays he has left a hundred and twenty; of "Autos Sacramentales," the peculiar Spanish allegorical development of the medieval mystery, we have seventy-three; besides a considerable number of farces.

The dominant motives in Calderon's dramas are characteristically national: fervid loyalty to Church and King, and a sense of honor heightened almost to the point of the fantastic. Though his plays are laid in a great variety of scenes and ages, the sentiment and the characters remain essentially Spanish; and this intensely local quality has probably lessened the vogue of Calderon in other countries. In the construction and conduct of his plots he showed great skill, yet the ingenuity expended in the management of the story did not restrain the fiery emotion and opulent imagination which mark his finest speeches and give them a lyric quality which some critics regard as his greatest distinction.

Of all Calderon's works, "Life is a Dream" may be regarded as the most universal in its theme. It seeks to teach a lesson that may be learned from the philosophers and religious thinkers of many ages--that the world of our senses is a mere shadow, and that the only reality is to be found in the invisible and eternal. The story which forms its basis is Oriental in origin, and in the form of the legend of "Barlaam and Josaphat" was familiar in all the literatures of the Middle Ages. Combined with this in the plot is the tale of Abou Hassan from the "Arabian Nights," the main situations in which are turned to farcical purposes in the Induction to the Shakespearean "Taming of the Shrew." But with Calderon the theme is lifted altogether out of the atmosphere of comedy, and is worked up with poetic sentiment and a touch of mysticism into a symbolic drama of profound and universal philosophical significance.

LIFE IS A DREAM

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Basilio	King of Poland.
Segismund	his Son.
Astolfo	his Nephew.
Estrella	his Niece.
Clotaldo	a General in Basilio's Service.
Rosaura	a Muscovite Lady.
Fife	her Attendant.

Chamberlain, Lords in Waiting, Officers,
Soldiers, etc., in Basilio's Service.

The Scene of the first and third Acts lies on the Polish frontier: of the second Act, in Warsaw.

As this version of Calderon's drama is not for acting, a higher and wider mountain-scene than practicable may be imagined for Rosaura's descent in the first Act and the soldiers' ascent in the last. The bad watch kept by the sentinels who guarded their state-prisoner, together with much else (not all!) that defies sober sense in this wild drama, I must leave Calderon to answer for; whose audience were not critical of detail and probability, so long as a good story, with strong, rapid, and picturesque action and situation, was set before them.

ACT I

SCENE I--A pass of rocks, over which a storm is rolling away,
and the sun setting: in the foreground, half-way down, a fortress.

(Enter first from the topmost rock Rosaura, as from horseback, in man's attire; and, after her, Fife.)

ROSAURA.
There, four-footed Fury, blast
Engender'd brute, without the wit
Of brute, or mouth to match the bit
Of man--art satisfied at last?
Who, when thunder roll'd aloof,

Tow'rd the spheres of fire your ears
Pricking, and the granite kicking
Into lightning with your hoof,
Among the tempest-shatter'd crags
Shattering your luckless rider
Back into the tempest pass'd?
There then lie to starve and die,
Or find another Phaeton
Mad-mettled as yourself; for I,
Wearied, worried, and for-done,
Alone will down the mountain try,
That knits his brows against the sun.

FIFE (as to his mule).
There, thou mis-begotten thing,
Long-ear'd lightning, tail'd tornado,
Griffin-hoof-in hurricano,
(I might swear till I were almost
Hoarse with roaring Asonante)
Who forsooth because our betters
Would begin to kick and fling
You forthwith your noble mind
Must prove, and kick me off behind,
Tow'rd the very centre whither
Gravity was most inclined.
There where you have made your bed
In it lie; for, wet or dry,
Let what will for me betide you,
Burning, blowing, freezing, hailing;
Famine waste you: devil ride you:
Tempest baste you black and blue:
(To Rosaura.)
There! I think in downright railing
I can hold my own with you.

ROS.
Ah, my good Fife, whose merry loyal pipe,
Come weal, come woe, is never out of tune
What, you in the same plight too?

FIFE.
Ay; And madam--sir--hereby desire,
When you your own adventures sing
Another time in lofty rhyme,
You don't forget the trusty squire
Who went with you Don-quixoting.

ROS.
Well, my good fellow--to leave Pegasus
Who scarce can serve us than our horses worse--

They say no one should rob another of
The single satisfaction he has left
Of singing his own sorrows; one so great,
So says some great philosopher, that trouble
Were worth encount'ring only for the sake
Of weeping over--what perhaps you know
Some poet calls the 'luxury of woe.'

FIFE.

Had I the poet or philosopher
In the place of her that kick'd me off to ride,
I'd test his theory upon his hide.
But no bones broken, madam--sir, I mean?--

ROS.

A scratch here that a handkerchief will heal--
And you?--

FIFE.

A scratch in _quiddity_, or kind:
But not in '_quo_'--my wounds are all behind.
But, as you say, to stop this strain,
Which, somehow, once one's in the vein,
Comes clattering after--there again!--
What are we twain--deuce take't!--we two,
I mean, to do--drench'd through and through--
Oh, I shall choke of rhymes, which I believe
Are all that we shall have to live on here.

ROS.

What, is our victual gone too?--

FIFE.

Ay, that brute
Has carried all we had away with her,
Clothing, and cate, and all.

ROS.

And now the sun,
Our only friend and guide, about to sink
Under the stage of earth.

FIFE.

And enter Night,
With Capa y Espada--and--pray heaven!
With but her lanthorn also.

ROS.

Ah, I doubt
To-night, if any, with a dark one--or

Almost burnt out after a month's consumption.
Well! well or ill, on horseback or afoot,
This is the gate that lets me into Poland;
And, sorry welcome as she gives a guest
Who writes his own arrival on her rocks
In his own blood--
Yet better on her stony threshold die,
Than live on unrevenged in Muscovy.

FIFE.
Oh, what a soul some women have--I mean
Some men--

ROS.
Oh, Fife, Fife, as you love me, Fife,
Make yourself perfect in that little part,
Or all will go to ruin!

FIFE.
Oh, I will,
Please God we find some one to try it on.
But, truly, would not any one believe
Some fairy had exchanged us as we lay
Two tiny foster-children in one cradle?

ROS.
Well, be that as it may, Fife, it reminds me
Of what perhaps I should have thought before,
But better late than never--You know I love you,
As you, I know, love me, and loyally
Have follow'd me thus far in my wild venture.
Well! now then--having seen me safe thus far
Safe if not wholly sound--over the rocks
Into the country where my business lies
Why should not you return the way we came,
The storm all clear'd away, and, leaving me
(Who now shall want you, though not thank you, less,
Now that our horses gone) this side the ridge,
Find your way back to dear old home again;
While I--Come, come!--
What, weeping my poor fellow?

FIFE.
Leave you here
Alone--my Lady--Lord! I mean my Lord--
In a strange country--among savages--
Oh, now I know--you would be rid of me
For fear my stumbling speech--

ROS.

Oh, no, no, no!--
I want you with me for a thousand sakes
To which that is as nothing--I myself
More apt to let the secret out myself
Without your help at all--Come, come, cheer up!
And if you sing again, 'Come weal, come woe,'
Let it be that; for we will never part
Until you give the signal.

FIFE.
'Tis a bargain.

ROS.
Now to begin, then. 'Follow, follow me,
'You fairy elves that be.'

FIFE.
Ay, and go on--
Something of 'following darkness like a dream,'
For that we're after.

ROS.
No, after the sun;
Trying to catch hold of his glittering skirts
That hang upon the mountain as he goes.

FIFE.
Ah, he's himself past catching--as you spoke
He heard what you were saying, and--just so--
Like some scared water-bird,
As we say in my country, _dove_ below.

ROS.
Well, we must follow him as best we may.
Poland is no great country, and, as rich
In men and means, will but few acres spare
To lie beneath her barrier mountains bare.
We cannot, I believe, be very far
From mankind or their dwellings.

FIFE.
Send it so!
And well provided for man, woman, and beast.
No, not for beast. Ah, but my heart begins
To yearn for her--

ROS.
Keep close, and keep your feet
From serving you as hers did.

FIFE.

As for beasts,
If in default of other entertainment,
We should provide them with ourselves to eat--
Bears, lions, wolves--

ROS.

Oh, never fear.

FIFE.

Or else,
Default of other beasts, beastlier men,
Cannibals, Anthropophagi, bare Poles
Who never knew a tailor but by taste.

ROS.

Look, look! Unless my fancy misconceive
With twilight--down among the rocks there, Fife--
Some human dwelling, surely--
Or think you but a rock torn from the rocks
In some convulsion like to-day's, and perch'd
Quaintly among them in mock-masonry?

FIFE.

Most likely that, I doubt.

ROS.

No, no--for look!
A square of darkness opening in it--

FIFE.

Oh, I don't half like such openings!--

ROS.

Like the loom
Of night from which she spins her outer gloom--

FIFE.

Lord, Madam, pray forbear this tragic vein
In such a time and place--

ROS.

And now again
Within that square of darkness, look! a light
That feels its way with hesitating pulse,
As we do, through the darkness that it drives
To blacken into deeper night beyond.

FIFE.

In which could we follow that light's example,

As might some English Bardolph with his nose,
We might defy the sunset--Hark, a chain!

ROS.
And now a lamp, a lamp! And now the hand
That carries it.

FIFE.
Oh, Lord! that dreadful chain!

ROS.
And now the bearer of the lamp; indeed
As strange as any in Arabian tale,
So giant-like, and terrible, and grand,
Spite of the skin he's wrapt in.

FIFE.
Why, 'tis his own:
Oh, 'tis some wild man of the woods; I've heard
They build and carry torches--

ROS.
Never Ape
Bore such a brow before the heavens as that--
Chain'd as you say too!--

FIFE.
Oh, that dreadful chain!

ROS.
And now he sets the lamp down by his side,
And with one hand clench'd in his tangled hair
And with a sigh as if his heart would break--

(During this Segismund has entered from the fortress, with a
torch.)

SEGISMUND.
Once more the storm has roar'd itself away,
Splitting the crags of God as it retires;
But sparing still what it should only blast,
This guilty piece of human handiwork,
And all that are within it. Oh, how oft,
How oft, within or here abroad, have I
Waited, and in the whisper of my heart
Pray'd for the slanting hand of heaven to strike
The blow myself I dared not, out of fear
Of that Hereafter, worse, they say, than here,
Plunged headlong in, but, till dismissal waited,
To wipe at last all sorrow from men's eyes,

And make this heavy dispensation clear.
Thus have I borne till now, and still endure,
Crouching in sullen impotence day by day,
Till some such out-burst of the elements
Like this rouses the sleeping fire within;
And standing thus upon the threshold of
Another night about to close the door
Upon one wretched day to open it
On one yet wretcheder because one more;--
Once more, you savage heavens, I ask of you--
I, looking up to those relentless eyes
That, now the greater lamp is gone below,
Begin to muster in the listening skies;
In all the shining circuits you have gone
About this theatre of human woe,
What greater sorrow have you gazed upon
Than down this narrow chink you witness still;
And which, did you yourselves not fore-devise,
You registered for others to fulfil!

FIFE.

This is some Laureate at a birthday ode;
No wonder we went rhyming.

ROS.

Hush! And now
See, starting to his feet, he strides about
Far as his tether'd steps--

SEG.

And if the chain
You help'd to rivet round me did contract
Since guiltless infancy from guilt in act;
Of what in aspiration or in thought
Guilty, but in resentment of the wrong
That wrecks revenge on wrong I never wrought
By excommunication from the free
Inheritance that all created life,
Beside myself, is born to--from the wings
That range your own immeasurable blue,
Down to the poor, mute, scale-imprison'd things,
That yet are free to wander, glide, and pass
About that under-sapphire, whereinto
Yourselves transfusing you yourselves englass!

ROS.

What mystery is this?

FIFE.

Why, the man's mad:

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