

The book *Lázarillo* [little Lázaro] *de Tormes* was published in 1554 by a humanist author who concealed his/her identity. The book was banned by the Spanish Inquisition, then at the height of its power. (In the 1500s the Inquisition ordered ~5,000 people in Spain to be burned at the stake. The author had plenty of motivation to hide, and plenty of courage to publish it at all.) Although the book circulated illegally, it was widely read. *Don Quixote*, published 50 years later, refers to *Lázarillo* as a book everyone in Spain has read and loves. Despite enormous interest over the centuries, we really don't know who wrote it. One leading candidate is Spanish aristocrat Juan de Valdés. According to Transylvanian Unitarian leader Francis David, Juan was a secret Unitarian. We will never know. Juan was good at keeping his mouth shut when necessary and died in bed.

Although the author was clearly well educated, the book is ostensibly the autobiography of a very poor child. The book presents the perspectives of many classes of Spanish society of the 1500s.

The excerpts are the first and last chapter of *Lázarillo de Tormes* and an interesting story from chapter 5.

Prologue

I believe that things worthy of attention shouldn't be left unheard and unseen, buried in the grave of oblivion. The reader might find them agreeable. Those ready to pay more than passing attention will be rewarded.

In this sense, there is no book, as Pliny says, however bad it might be, without something good in it.

There is no agreement on matters of taste: what one person won't eat another will find delectable. Likewise something might be seen as having little value in one place and appreciated in another. For that reason, nothing should be rejected or destroyed, no matter how unappealing it might be. Truth should be brought to light, without prejudice, seeking to bare some fruit.

If it were otherwise, few authors would write only for one reader, since it is done with much effort. Those who embark on it want to be compensated, not with money but with exposure, their work being seen and read by others, and, if it is of any merit, applauded as well. Cicero states thus: "Honor nurses art." Does anyone think that the soldier, who sits at the lowest of the social scale, has little regard for his own life? Surely not. It's the desire for praise that makes him get in harm's way.

It's the same with the arts as it is with literature. Such is the case of the student of theology. He talks about the goodness of things and recommends to others paths for the betterment

of the soul. Yet ask him if he gets upset when others say: “Your Reverence, your words are wonderful!” Likewise for so-and-so whose jousting was embarrassing yet the jester still celebrates his skills. Would he have liked to hear the truth?

Everything is this way. I confess not to be more honest than my neighbors, as is clear from my clumsy style. No doubt there are parts in my narrative readers will find enjoyable and will recognize in them a person they know, made of good luck, danger, and adversities.

First Chapter. Lázaro Recounts His Life and Who His Parents Were

Your Excellency should know, first of all, that my name is Lázaro of Tormes, son of Tomé González and Antona Pérez, originally from Tejares, a village near Salamanca. I was born on the River Tormes, which is why I have this name. It happened this way. My father, God rest his soul, was in charge of a windmill on the riverbank. He worked for over fifteen years. My mother was pregnant with me, ready to give birth, and one night I came onto this world right there, so I can say I was truly born on the river.

Now when I was eight years old, my father was caught stealing from the sacks belonging to the mill. He was arrested and confessed, denying nothing. He was prosecuted and punished by law. I hope to God he is in His Glory, because the Gospel says they are blessed. There was a campaign against the Moors in those years and my father took part in it, since he was already living away as part of the sentence. He went as a mule driver for a gentleman that went to the campaign. His life ended when he and this gentleman were killed. My widowed mother, finding herself without a husband and without shelter, opted to approach some wealthy patrons and thus came to live in the city with one of them. She began to cook for certain students and to wash clothes for the stable boys of the Comendador of La Magdalena. So she hung about the stables.

She and a brown-skinned man, one of those who took care of the horses, became intimately connected. He would sometimes come to our house and leave in the morning. On other occasions, he would arrive at our door by day, pretending to buy eggs, and would enter the house. At the beginning of their relationship, I had a rough time with him. I was afraid of him because of his color and his bad demeanor. But when I realized that his arrival meant better food, I started to like him. He always brought bread, meat, and firewood to warm up during winter.

So he kept coming, and their conversations continued. My mother gave birth to a very pretty little brown-skinned, boy, whom I juggled in my arms and helped to keep warm.

I remember my brown-skinned stepfather playing with the boy one day, and he saw that my mother and I were white and he wasn't. He would run away, afraid of my stepfather. The

moment he reached my mother, he would say, "Look mummy, the bogeyman!" Smiling, my stepfather would respond: "Hijodeputa! You motherfucker!"

Although still young, I noticed the word my little brother had uttered and said under my breath: "There must be many in this world who run away from others because they don't see themselves!"

It was our bad fortune that the relationship between my mother and Zaide, which was his name, came to the ears of his employer's steward who carried out an investigation. He found that Zaide was stealing about half the oats used for the cattle. He rescued firewood, curry combs, aprons, horse sheets, and blankets. When there was nothing left to steal, he would take the shoes off the horses' feet. All this he would give to my mother to sell for her to raise my little brother. Let us not marvel that a priest or a friar robs his flock to support his vices or those of his peers when love leads a poor slave to act this way.

All that I say is true and then more because they threatened me to make me talk and, since I was just a boy and was terrorized, I testified and even described how I sold a blacksmith some horseshoes when my mother asked me to.

My poor stepfather was whipped and basted with boiling oil. My mother was put on trial, which resulted not only in the usual punishment of ten lashes but her being forbidden to enter the house of the aforementioned Comendador and to have an aggrieved Zaide in her house.

Not to complicate matters even further, my poor mother made an effort and obeyed the court. To avoid danger as well as gossip, she became a servant with the people living at the Solana Inn. There my little brother, suffering a thousand indignities, was raised until he learned how to walk and became an adolescent. He ran errands for the guests, providing wine, candles, and whatever else was needed.

At that time, a blind man came to stay at the inn. Hoping I could be of use to him on the road, he asked my mother if he could take me. She agreed, telling him I was the son of a good man who had been killed for the glory of the faith in the battle of Los Gelves. She said she trusted God that I wouldn't be worse than my father. Since I was an orphan, she begged him to treat me well. He responded that he would and that he embraced me not just as a boy but as a son. So I began serving and guiding my new master.

We spent a few days in Salamanca. My master realized it wasn't a profitable place for him, so he decided to go somewhere else. Before we departed, I went to see my mother. The two of us were crying. She blessed me, saying:

"Son, I know I won't see you ever again. Try to be good and may God guide you. I have raised you as best I could and given you love. Find your worth." I went back to my master, who was waiting for me.

We left Salamanca and reached the bridge. There is an animal stone there that almost looks like a bull. The blind man asked me to come close to it. Once there, he told me:

"Lázaro, put your ear close to the bull. You will hear a loud noise inside it."

It was a simple task, and I did it. When he felt I had my head next to the stone, he gave me such a blow that my head crashed against it. The pain from the goring lasted more than three days. He said:

"Dumb one! You must learn. The blind man's boy must know more than the devil himself."

He laughed out loud.

At that moment I felt as if I had suddenly woken up from a stupor. I said under my breath: "He tells the truth. I must be alert because I am alone. I need to figure out how to survive on my own."

We began traveling, and in just a few days he taught me thieves' slang. When he realized I was sharp, he was pleased. He would say: "I can't give you gold or silver; but I'll teach you lessons for life."

He did indeed. After God, he taught me how to live, and because he was blind, he gave me light and prepared me for the path.

I must tell these childish stories to Your Excellency to show you the virtue of men who know how to rise from the lowest levels and how those on top often fall because of vice.

Now, getting back to the blind man and to further tell Your Excellency about my affairs, you must know that in this world there has never been anyone more astute and cunning.

He was an eagle at his trade. He knew a hundred blessings. He recited them in a lower voice, softly, taking a breath, emitting the right sound. The church would resonate with his chant. He put up a humble, devout expression, which he used to his advantage. He made no gesture or faces. He didn't roll his eyes as others do.

Beyond this, he had a thousand ways to steal money from people. He knew prayers for diverse purposes: for women who couldn't get pregnant, for women giving birth, for couples stuck in bad marriages, and for wives eager to recover their husbands' dimming love. He could foretell if a pregnant woman was about to give birth to a boy or a girl. In the case of medicine, he said that Galen knew only half of what he himself did to extract a

tooth and cure fainting fits, and morning sickness. And last of all, if anyone said they were ill, he would say: "Take this, do that, drink herbal tea, get that root."

As a result, the entire world sought him, especially women who believed everything he told them. He earned more in a month than what a hundred blind men earn in an entire year.

Fifth Chapter. How Lázaro Settled with a Seller of Indulgences and the Things That Happened to Him

Fate brought me to my fifth master, who sold papal indulgences. He was the most shameless, uninhibited, and abusive dealer I ever saw, expect to see, or think anyone else has seen. He sought different ways and means and devised subtle tricks.

As he entered places where he would peddle indulgences, first he would offer gifts to priests. Nothing of great value or substance: a head of lettuce from Murcia, a couple of oranges when they were in season, a pair of lemons or oranges, a peach, a pair of peaches, or wonderful green pears. The presents were meant to keep them happy so they would help him in his business, summon the parishioners to buy the indulgences.

When they thanked him, he would find out how learned they were. If they said they understood Latin, he wouldn't speak a word of it, so as not to make a mistake. Instead, he would use elegant and well-turned Castilian, in which his tongue would find eloquence. And if he found out that the clergy were reverends (by which I mean, with more money than education, and ordained improperly), he would carry himself like Saint Thomas, talking to them in Latin for two hours. At least it looked that way, even if it were less.

When he didn't succeed in selling indulgence, he would take a dishonest route. People didn't like this approach, since he would take advantage of them. Since it would take too long to describe everything he did, I will tell about one of his sly and clever dodges, to prove my point.

He had been preaching in the Sagra of Toledo for two or three days, displaying his usual eloquence. Yet no one was buying a single indulgence, nor, as far as I could tell, was anyone interested. He was fed up, and, thinking what to do, he summoned everyone to come again the next day so he could try unloading his goods.

After supper that night, he and the constable began to gamble. Soon after, they had a discussion and a fight began between them. He called the constable a thief and the constable called him a forger. At the accusation, my master seized a small spear he found lying on the porch. The constable put his hand on a sword he had on his belt.

A ruckus ensued. The fighters were quickly surrounded by guests and neighbors, who tried to separate them. They tried to get away so they could kill each other. There was lots of

noise. The house was full. Realizing they wouldn't be able to duel with their weapons, the fighters again resorted to insulting one another. The constable told my master he was a forger and that the indulgences he was selling were fake.

When it was clear the combatants wouldn't come to their senses, the villagers decided to take the constable away from the inn. This infuriated my master even more. The guests in the inn and the neighbors begged him to stop being angry. In the end he went to sleep and everyone departed too.

In the morning, my master went to church and asked them to ring the bell for the Mass. He wanted to give a sermon. All the village came, still talking about what had happened the night before, saying the indulgences were false and that the constable, during the fight, had made this clear publicly. My master was in such bad mood, everyone hated him even more.

The pardoner climbed into the pulpit and, in his sermon, encouraged people not to be left without the benefit the indulgences would provide them. When he was at the height of his talk, in through the church door came in the constable, pretending to pray. He stood up and, with a loud voice, started to say coherently:

"Good people, please hear me for a minute, and then you can listen to any- one else you want. I came here because of this charlatan who is talking to you. He fooled me, saying that if I helped him in his business, we would share the profits. But now I realize the damage he would do to conscience and to your pocket. I regret my decision and declare to you openly that the indulgences he sells are false. You shouldn't believe him or have a part in all this, since I am no longer involved in the deal, renouncing from now on any partnership. If at some point he is punished for his false statements, you are my witness that I am no longer with him, nor am I helping him. I am trying to show him in his true light and declare his maliciousness."

That was the end of the speech.

Several worthy men that were sitting in the congregation stood up and, so as to avoid further scandal, were ready to throw the constable out of the church. Fearing excommunication, my master made a gesture with his hand, asking them not to become an obstacle in his wish to offer a rebuttal. Once again, there was silence as the constable said everything as I have reported it. When he was finished, my master asked that, if he had anything else to add, now it was the right time to state it.

The constable said:

"There is much more to say about you and your lying, but it's enough for now."

Then the constable fell on his knees in the pulpit, clasped his hands, and, gazing heavenward, said the following:

"God, from whom nothing is hidden, to whom everything is known, and for whom nothing is impossible! You know in truth how unfairly I am being portrayed now. Yet, as far as I am concerned, I forgive him, so that You, my God, may forgive me as well. You shall not pay attention to him, for he knows not what he does or says. The injury done to You, I beg thou not to forget. For those congregated here, who might have perhaps considered buying indulgences from this man, and believing his false statements, will not buy one after all. And since all this is also in detriment of the rest of the people, I beg You, oh God, not to falter in your response, for I have proof here of a miracle, which is the following: that if what this man says is true, that I am the one bringing evil and falsity, may this pulpit sink into the ground, with me in it, and let us be buried seven feet under, where we will perish. But if what I declare is true, and he, persuaded by the devil, so as to take away from those here present their estimable wealth, is spreading evil, let him be the one that is punished, his villainy known to all."

No sooner had my master finished praying when the unhappy constable fell off his bench and hit the floor with such power that the entire church shuddered with the impact. He began to howl and foam at the mouth and twist his face into weird expressions, flinging his feet and hands around, rolling back and forth on the floor.

The screams and shouts were so loud the congregation couldn't hear anything. A few people were shocked and frightened.

Some of them said: "May God help him!" Others: "It serves him well, perjuring himself like that."

Finally a number of those present, and as far as I could see not without trepidation, approached him and grasped his arms, as he was punching those around him. Others seized his legs and held them tight. He was shaking like no beast I have ever seen in the entire world. They kept him immobilized for a long time. More than fifteen men were on top of him. He was a handful. If they hadn't subdued him, he would have kicked them on the face.

While all this was going on, my master was on his knees in the pulpit, his hands clasped and gazing up to heaven, crying and making noises, as if in communion with a godly essence. No one in the church was able to pull him away from his divine contemplation.

Some good men approached him and, saying something, shook him out of his trance, begging him to help the poor man who was dying. They asked him not to look the at the past or to the bad comments made of him, since he had already received punishment for them.

If there was anything he could do to stop the danger and torment the man was suffering, for God's sake he should do it. In their view, the guilt of the guilty had already been proven. Thus his truth and good heart were needed now because God doesn't see the need in prolonging revenge and punishment.

As if waking up from a sweet dream, my master the pardoner looked at them, then looked at the delinquent and everyone around him. He said very slowly:

"Good people, you should never plead for any man whom God has shown his will. But as He commands us not to spread evil and to forgive any offense, we may confidently implore His Majesty to pardon this man who offended him by placing an obstacle in the way of His Holy Faith. Let us all kneel."

Everyone went down on their knees and, facing the altar, began to sing a litany in a low voice with the priests. My master came with the cross and the holy water, and when had chanted over the constable, his hands facing heaven and his eyes almost unrecognizable, he began reciting a prayer as a long expression of devotion. Everyone cried (as it often happens during sermons on the Passion, when the preachers and congregation are at their most devout), begging Our Lord, since He doesn't want sinners to die but for them to go on with their life so as to repent, that a man like the constable, having been led astray by the devil, who counseled him in death and sin, be forgiven and granted life and health, so that he could repent and confess his sins.

Having done this, he asked them to bring the indulgences and put one on the constable's head. And immediately the sinful constable, little by little, started to feel better, coming back to his senses. And when he regained his wits, he kneeled again next to the pardoner's feet and asked for an apology. He confessed that what he had said had been guided by the devil, in order to cause my master injury and take revenge against his fury. Also and more important, he said he did it because the evil wanted to benefit from it all by not having the indulgences bought.

My master forgave him and they became friends again. Soon there was such a rush to buy indulgences that almost no living soul in the place was left without one: husband and wife, sons and daughters, boys and girls.

The news of what had happened circulated in the surrounding area. As soon as we would reach a particular village, there would be no need for a sermon or to call everyone to church because people would come to the inn where we would stay like pears to a basket. So we did between ten to twelve villages around there, where my master sold some thousand indulgences without having to preach a sermon.

When he performed his act, I confess to also having been sinful, since his persuasive touch also led me astray, as it did many others. Yet in seeing my master and the constable laughing, proud at how they managed their joint business, I came to understand how one had benefited from the other and how inventive my master really was.

Chapter Seven Lazaro Settles Down

This is the last chapter, in which Lazaro finds happiness as a government employee with a pretend marriage to the Archbishop's mistress.

As I was thinking how to settle down, have a more restful life and save enough for my old age, it pleased God to enlighten me and put me on the way to a fruitful path. With the help of friends and gentlemen, all my hardships and struggles until would be compensated by achieving my ambition: a job in the government. No one who works in those positions faces obstacles.

To this day I have such job, in the service God and Your Excellency. My duty is to cry up the wines sold in this town and to announce actions and lost property. I also accompany criminals being punished and publicly announce their misdeeds. To put it in plain words, I am a pregonero—a town crier.

Things have gone well for me. I do my job easily. All aspects and responsibilities in this line of work make their way to me. To such an extent that any investor selling in wine in the city is aware of Lázaro of Tormes is a go-between. Without me the path shows no profit.

At this time, the Archbishop of San Salvador, a friend and servant of Your Excellency, witnessed my ability and manners in crying out wines. He made an arrangement for me to marry one of his maids. Realizing such arrangement would be beneficial to me, I agreed. And so I married her. To this day I don't regret it. She has a good nature and is dutiful and responsible. I also have full trust in my Archbishop. He gives her a bag of wheat every year. On Easter there's meat. Occasionally there are a couple of loaves of holy bread or a pair of old stockings. He rents us a small house next to his. And nearly every Sunday and holidays we eat in his house.

There is never a shortage of rumors. They don't leave us in peace. People say I don't know what goes on when my wife makes his bed or cooks for him. May God help those who lie.

To confess, I myself have been suspicious during this period. Sometime I have to wait long after dinner. Sometimes it gets even worse. I frequently recall what the blind man from Escalona told me, with his hand on the horn. Though to tell the truth, I have the impression the devil brings him back to my mind so as to bring discord between me and my wife. But it didn't help him anyway.

She isn't a woman who pays attention to this kind of mockery. And my lord the Archbishop made me a promise I know he will fulfill. He made it to me one day in front of her:

"Lázaro of Tormes, nobody who pays attention to this type of gossip can be happy. I say this because I wouldn't be surprised if somebody, seeing your wife enter my house.... She comes in and leaves with her honor intact, and yours is too. Don't pay attention to what others say. Only look at good deeds and at what brings you benefit."

"Sir," I responded, "I have made up my mind to do good and surround myself with fine people. To be honest, some of my friends have told me all about it. They have proven to me that before our marriage, she gave birth three times. I speak with reverence to Your Honor because she is here."

Whereupon my wife swore such fearful oaths, I was sure the house would come down. Then she began to cry, to curse the priest who married us. Such was her grievance that she wished she had died before the priest had given us his blessing. I took one side of her and my lord the other while we talked her out of that state. We pampered her until she stopped crying. She made me swear I would never raise the issue again, that I would be content on allowing her to come and go, day and night, since she was a virtuous woman. So we three reached an agreement.

To this day, no one has heard us speak again about the situation. Whenever anybody wants to say something about her, I stop them. I say:

"Look, if you're my friend, know that I don't want to hear about it, since friends aren't made to upset you. She is what I most cherish in the world. I don't want anything to happen to her. God has blessed me by putting her at my side, more than I deserve it. I pray to the Holy Ghost that she is as virtuous as any woman within the confines of Toledo. If anyone says otherwise, I shall kill him."

So no one says anything and I have peace at home.

All this took place the same year as our victorious emperor entered this illustrious city of Toledo and held his courts here amid celebrations, as Your Excellency no doubt has heard. In this period I was at the height of my prosperity and the summit of all good fortune.

In due course, I will inform Your Excellency of what happens to me in the future.