

Chapter Ten

Journey to St. Michael's Fair in Leipzig, and thence to Amsterdam

It happened, quite nicely, that just at that time there fell a church holiday which was so useful to the future married couple that they were able to wed a week earlier than would otherwise have been the case, because in eight days the bans could be read three times; for although folks are wont to overlook and forgive four weeks in newly wed women, 'tis still best in these cases where danger is to be feared that one chooses to go the safest way. Now after my wife and I had in this fine manner helped them to the cross they needs must bear, we gave her even more of a hand so that Freddie was able to set up a small shop in which to seek his fortune chaffering. I, however, at that time took my greatest pleasure in my invisibility, which pleasure then consisted for the most part only in sneaking up on birds and taking them down from the branches in my hands, which by itself so delighted me that I should not have given up again my handkerchief and what was in it for all the world's goods.

Then the time drew nigh at which I was obliged to journey on business to the Leipzig Michaelmas Fair; I should have liked to take my little handkerchief along, but knew not in what manner, for when I had it with me, I was invisible; but how would I be able to do business with someone if they could not see me? I saved it over in the form of a large package so that indeed naught of the material contained in it, and thus also perchance the real piece, which had the power, might not be lost. I need not worry that this package would be easily stolen from me, for when I put it from me, one was not able to see it but easily to grasp and feel it. I had a saddlebag in which I

was wont, according to the occasion and time, to carry money overland when I traveled anywhere on business. This I took with me to my garden to pack in it along with other things, such as anemone roots and flower-bulbs, also my little handkerchief, since I had persuaded my wife that I had promised to make a present of these garden rarities to one of my good friends and patrons in Leipzig. Now as soon as I had put my little handkerchief in, look you, I was no longer able to see it, but was well able to feel or grasp it; whenever I then took it out again, then I saw it again. This I tried out several times, and after I had thus assured myself of the thing's nature and effect, I should also have liked to know whether people also did not see me when I carried the invisible saddlebag with me. I tried it out at first on the birds and found that they did not wait for me as they did when I had only the little handkerchief with me. Afterwards I stood at my garden door by the road and learned from the greetings and honors which passers-by gave me that I was seen and therefore the power of invisibility extended no further than to the saddlebag. In this manner I, in visible form, took my invisibility in my invisible saddlebag home, where I pondered the matter further and found that my little handkerchief, kept in a little leather pouch, made the little pouch, of course, invisible, but not him who had it with him. And thus, I was now able to carry my invisibility with me and let myself be seen, without putting it away, or make myself invisible with it when I wished, especially since I made for myself for this purpose a special leather bag and carried in it the package which I had formed out of my little handkerchief.

Just at the time when I was busy in my little garden house with my investigation of the just-mentioned property of my little handkerchief, I heard in the garden situated next to mine, which belonged to a distinguished and wealthy gentleman of the quill, a woman lamenting her misfortune with weeping and sighs; she was somewhat

too far from me and spoke her words of lamentation so secretly that I was not able to understand them, and the place where she was lamenting lay just behind a currant hedge, so that I wasn't able to see her either. But because I should nevertheless have liked to know both who she was and what was ailing her, I took to myself my little handkerchief and sneaked to her in the garden. Look you; it was the cousin and boarder of that woman to whose husband this garden belonged. I was unable to divine what else could be troubling her save that perchance she might be in love; for neither of wealth, nor youth, nor beauty, nor other things which Fortune might give to a young lady in this world, did she lack the least thing. She used up annually for her upkeep (although she lived splendidly) not half the income from her estates and revenues, which had been left to her seven or eight years before by her deceased parents. To all outward appearances she lived so pleasant a life that anyone would have been hard put to guess what better one she could have wished for, and had, moreover, not only a half dozen honorable and well-born suitors, each of whom hoped to earn her love, especially since both widowers and bachelors are found around such a wealthy and beautiful woman just as frequently as wasps and midges are around a fat honey-hive. In addition, she had her choice from among many, even though the least among them all was such that she durst with quite good conscience take him as her spouse.

I had scarcely taken up a position at a place where I intended to eavesdrop further on this lady when I saw squatting in another corner her cousin, who was likewise listening secretly to her. She had her hands clasped together, just as if she herself were uttering the laments, and was staring so at her cousin through the rosebush there that one could easily conclude from it that she had already understood with horror the lady's problem and was participating in it with rare sympathy. Meanwhile the other woman was still continuing to

weep, so that on her rosy cheeks one tear was scarcely able to escape the other, without her letting pass several explicit words from which could be remarked what was perturbing her, since she was lamenting a wanton Panphilius, to whose godless sense of honor she had entrusted more faith and belief than she should have and than he merited. Aha, thought I to myself, assuredly your maidenhead has suffered a shipwreck. What I thought to myself was indeed the case, and not only this but even more still, namely the reward which a woman after such work is occasionally wont to carry away in her belly. And I was straightway assured of this, for when the cousin imagined that her little cousin would babble naught further and more specifically than what she had already heard sufficiently clearly from her words (since now she was making shift only with weeping and thereby affirming what she had said before), she moved out of her ambush and surprised the so plaintively weeping mademoiselle in the second rank of her seizure, when she was able to repulse neither the attack of her sighs nor the flood of her excessive tears. "What is this, young maid, or better, young woman," said she, "in what state do I find you, in which I never foresaw that I should encounter you? Now I am assured that I actually know the reason, which I have hitherto only suspected, why you have recently several times felt ill. Just confess the affair to me quickly and tell me who the father is so that we may take counsel betimes and preserve you from future shame. Do not conceal from me, your best friend in the world, even the slightest thing, for just as one should put the best face on what cannot be undone, I shall also do in this matter what it behooves your closest relative to do, as one who must needs share both your honor and your shame."

Hereupon the good, all too merciful or too gullible maiden howled for a good while afterwards before she was able to recover herself to speak; but finally she said: "Most esteemed cousin, you never, to be

sure, bade me do what I did, but on the other hand you did not warn me either about what would happen to me, but rather gave me free rein and permitted straw and fire to come together by allowing me all too great a freedom and intercourse with your boarders, whereby I, a poor and inexperienced thing, easily strayed with the flames of my ruin. 'Twas Monsieur N., a cavalier as valiant and reputable as he is wanton and forgetful of honor, who deceived me by feigning unbearable love for me and promising to be ever true to me, and who after promising with terrible oaths to marry me, robbed me of my maidenhead and led me, as it were, into that which I received from him. When he recently departed from here so abruptly, he swore to me by all that is holy that he was doing it to speed up our union in holy wedlock; but today I receive a letter from him in which he notifies me that his most noble friends, who are related to princes, will never allow him to wed me, even should I be ever so wealthy, and now he is moreover compelled to marry a lady from the family of a high-ranking count, which lady's powerful relatives he dare not offend, which without doubt would not transpire without danger to his life and loss of his considerable income if he were to prefer a person of lower birth to their relative."

When she had thus confessed all this, she began to weep again as if she were about to despair; her cousin was therefore obliged to console her all the better. "Odd's blood, cousin!" said she. "That's no reason to hang yourself. You are not the first and without doubt will not be the last who has been betrayed by faithless men. You must fight this evil sex with their own weapons and pay them in their own coin. Just be of good heart, dear little cousin, and let it be of particular comfort to you that I treated my husband the same way too; for I too became pregnant while single, and in fact not by one of my own class or by a nobleman who did not wish to marry me, but rather by my cousin's manservant who dared not sit down where I put my

feet; and indeed not by a man who seduced me but by one whom I myself teased into doing it. Now when my mother, God rest her soul, caught wind of it and saw through it she sent me to one of her country estates, where I secretly gave birth and had the woman in charge of the farm put the child as a foundling in a place where he is still being brought up and now is about nine years old. You can well imagine that before my wedding (although I knew that everything that had happened had been concealed from everyone) I had trepidations about the wedding night, out of fear that my bridegroom might perchance notice something; but my dear blessed mother was much too cautious for that; she made my breasts as rigid again as if no man had ever touched them, not to mention that a child had sucked at them, and otherwise so arranged things with me that my husband must needs have had a keener nose than he did if he were to scent anything but an immaculate virgin. I still know the recipe, and it will stand you in good stead. Now should anyone know the truth, save our above-mentioned overseeress, who was present at the birth, and were they to say anything about it to my husband or reproach me about it, then I know that he himself would swear on my behalf, pursue such a tattle-tale as the worst calumniator, and compel him to confess his lies for the truth by recanting.

“I must often laugh myself when I think of how nicely the deceit went for me, and how sympathetic my husband acted when I behaved so badly on the wedding night in bed with him. And, dear little cousin, you must simply do the same thing, for I see no other remedy for it. I shall send you to the widowed sister of my mother, with whom you may stay secretly till you are relieved of your body’s burden and have got a good color back. She will assuredly help take care of the child; then you can come back here to my home and make an honorable marriage with one or the other of your suitors, over whose eyes we shall then pull the wool just as I did with my husband.”

The young lady listened to this discourse with such attentiveness that her weeping was in fact dispelled by it; she thanked her cousin for the good advice she had given, and promised to follow it faithfully. I, however, considered the manifold deceptions of cunning women-folk, which I had perceived, through the power of my invisibility, in my own wife and her housekeeper as well as in this so reputable lady. But I did not think at all to punish myself too, and to consider that if there were no wanton young fellows, then there would be no whores either, but rather I resolved to henceforth dispense with the company of all women and, so that I might be away from mine, not only to travel at the earliest opportunity to Leipzig to the Michaelmas Fair, but also to travel from there for a time as far as to Amsterdam, where I was well known anyway, since I had been brought up there from my ninth to my seventeenth year, and had there laid the foundation for learning the first things about business and commerce.

In this small world, in which one can see nearly the entire great world, down to the last detail, I arrived six weeks after my departure, after I had first instructed the apothecary how he was to behave till my return toward my wife, my business and my whole household, especially since I had taken along with me as much money as I thought I needed in the meanwhile.

