

Chapter Seventeen

Anyone who wishes to know what is in this chapter must either read it himself or have someone read it to him unless, of course, someone has already told him about it.

At about this time I began to reflect both on how I might get my Esther and our baby daughter out of Eliezar's house and power, and how I might provide for the two of them. I thought to burden good Erasmus with her so that the two should not marry outside their race, and I thought of means by which I might lay hand on a sizable amount of money, which I was going to give to him along with them so that it should lighten for him this burden, which many are wont to find very onerous and repugnant to bear, and should move him to shoulder it gladly. For, dear reader, how heavy must indeed nowadays a thing be in the world to outweigh sweet gold? I well knew, to be sure, that Esther was endowed with much rare and incomparable beauty that far wealthier and more qualified fellows than Erasmus would have considered it a great stroke of fortune, indeed the highest happiness itself were they to have got hold of her for their spouse; but on the other hand, when I observed her and my young half-Jewish messiah-brat, of whom no one other than myself knew of what spirit and flesh he had been built (save what I had told Erasmus about it) and considered that both cow and calf would have to be brought to sale together, then it was not difficult for me to imagine with what affection and constant future faithfulness they might be accepted in that status in which they should live unseparated, were they not provided and bound together with money, as with a golden chain. Moreover, I was not yet so wanton and godless as to cast to the winds unprovided for and leave amongst the Jews my own creature, my

own flesh and blood, of which fact, I was better assured than many a pious husband; therefore my idea was: look and see where you can get some money.

I did not wish to diminish what money I had on hand and needed for my business, which is the common way of all insatiable misers who, the more they have, the more they desire, and do not have enough till the flames of hell clap together seventeen *stadia* above their heads; and I was much too slothful, or deemed myself much too well-born to use my invisibility to steal little by little from here and there money by the pound till I had a hundredweight of it so that I might give a million to my wild sprig together with his Jewish tribe; therefore I devised other new schemes, which, however, profited me as the remainder of my history will tell.

Little by little I had made the acquaintances of all manner of folks, and in fact it made no difference to me whether I spent my time with rich or poor, with honorable, bold people or with wicked good-for-nothing ones. Anyone who was upright I treated with all manner of civility, as their estate and humor required, in order to win their affections, and with slight effort bound the needy to me in friendship through my generosity so that, to be sure, I might in the end take in the rich and thus deprive them as much as possible of what was theirs, and so that in the poor I might have loyal servants available for all exigencies. And so I had lads with whom I made merry and passed my time. Among these was one who of them all took me into his confidence most and poured out as it were all the innermost secrets of his heart, and whom I for all that by no means reckoned among my best and most loyal friends, even if he had meant well by me, because his friendship led me down a path on which the end of my life might present the most terrible example of the most pitiable of all tragedies. That, however, things turned out better for me than I ever deserved from God, so that I finally came to

a recognition of what I myself was, which is no small beginning on the path to a good end, I owe not to that lad's friendship but to God's goodness alone.

The first trick he taught me was how to prepare gunpowder which made no report when shot, but rather gave off only a slight noise, gunpowder, the possession of which is more proper for footpads and highwaymen than for honorable folk, but for which, on the other hand, the former are all the more sharply punished when they are caught. The second one was likewise a gunpowder, one with which you were able to shoot birds so that they were in fact not harmed by it but so stunned that you could pick them up as if they were dead and later, when they came to their senses again, have them alive. Thirdly he taught me how to mix something with gunpowder so that it would affect human beings just as the other gunpowder did birds, so that when one shot a person in the head with a rifle or a pistol which had been shot in this fashion, the person would lie there for an hour and a half or even two hours as if dead, despite the fact that he was not in the least further injured. This last trick, like the first one was of no use to me, unless I should have had my amusement with human beings as well as with birds or should have wished to play the role of a miserable footpad and know the victims would be dead only till I had plundered them and made off with the loot. Nevertheless, that I might be able to do it, if I had wished to, pricked my curiosity; and it was precisely this curiosity which spurred me on to begin this *praeludium*, and in my unreasonableness I did not consider it anything bad, because all three gunpowders' preparation seemed to me to be in accord with the laws of nature, even though it was the ABC to excel with time in that act which one calls the "black" art, which in the end leads the straightest possible way to the devil.

For after my preceptor noticed my curiosity and saw that I was eager to learn yet more, he presented me other lessons and proceeded

from the natural to the unnatural art. He and one of his comrades once took me to an isolated spot to test on a cat, which we brought with us, a slip of virgin parchment on which there was written in bat's blood words in a strange unintelligible language, and which was supposed to make one invulnerable if it was bound under the left arm, and when I myself had loaded my rifle, which was otherwise so good that I was boldly able to rely on it, with live powder, and when I tried to shoot the cat with the parchment slip under its left forepaw, look you, the rifle would not fire, even though the powder in the pan completely burned up. After that I fired again almost ten times, but my good rifle did not do me the service of making even a single spark of fire, even though I changed the flint several times and each time put in fresh priming-powder, at which I finally became so mad that I was about to smash it to pieces against a tree, at which action my preceptor's comrade laughed, stopped me and bade me fire one more time, announcing that as a joke he had stopped up the barrel of my rifle or charmed the shot. Thereupon I shot the cat so that the ribs in its body cracked, although not a hair of its pelt, not to mention its fur, was damaged.

Who was more eager than I to be able to do these two fine tricks, too? I promised my two companions to give them in return both what I had and what I did not yet possess, which companions, however, wished to accept nothing whatsoever from me, because of my generosity, so they said, but rather were willing to teach me these as well as other excellent tricks for naught whatsoever. After this I took them to breakfast, and afterwards to their lodgings, where they showed me a written book wherein so many arts, both natural and unnatural were recorded that anyone who had learned and practiced all of them should soon have made himself famous amongst the folk and achieved the reputation of an arch-sorcerer. In it was how to make oneself invulnerable in various ways, and, by contrast, to

deprive others of their invulnerable condition; how to charm women into falling in love; how to catch game; how to extinguish great conflagrations by magic; how to make oneself invisible; how to conjure up dragoons on a battlefield; and how to bring about many hundreds of other things. They forthwith let me see the proof of some of these tricks by hanging about a cock's neck naught but a piece of straw together with a slip of virgin parchment tied on with a thread which a virgin had spun on a Saturday evening, which cock afterwards acted as if it were carrying a large beam. They had a root which, when held to any sort of lock, straightway burst it open; this so well pleased me, because to my way of thinking it was such an excellent complement to my invisibility that I did not leave off asking for it until I got it from them. Afterwards they showed me many other diverse tricks, namely how to have every day three sure shots; how to pour musket balls which must needs have blood and open up anything that is fortified; how to find and dig up buried treasures; also, how to assure good luck at gaming. Lastly, there were also arts of catching fish and birds with one's bare hands; of having a thaler which, every time it was spent, came back into one's purse; and even of a ducat which, when put over night under one's hat, was joined by nine more ducats; which should have reminded me of Fortunatus' magic purse, had it only happened in good conscience. I found spells to drive thunder and hailstorms away and to elsewhere, which seemed to me not less than being able to make weather oneself. *In summa*, there became known to me all manner of arts, some of which pleased me and some of which made my hair stand on end, without doubt because I was still a novice and not accustomed to such terrible things.

