

Chapter Nineteen

Cow and calf are put in the same stall

When I had sufficiently understood from the discourse of these two that Esther was in love with Erasmus and he also with her, and especially that the two, had I not intervened with my shuttle, had intended to get married and following that run off, but before that to take along from Eliezar some provisions for the journey, I began to regret that I had skimmed the cream off away from good Erasmus, prevented through my lewdness the conversion of Esther as well as Josanna, and had caused Erasmus himself no few trials of conscience, while on the other hand I had strengthened the Jews in their senseless hopes and expectations; therefore I thought to set this all straightway aright again, although I was not able to restore Esther's virginity for honest Erasmus, in place of which he was to have my daughter for his own. I walked invisibly along out of the room when Josanna left, but straightway came back again invisible in form, went to Erasmus and of course acted as if I had just come from someplace or other, and as if I had met Josanna downstairs outside the house, asking what manner of woman that be who had been with him and what business she had to accomplish here.

Erasmus was so honest and candid that he not only told me their entire discourse, but also added that he and Esther had borne a secret love for each other for a long time, but had never spoken to each other face to face, much less touched one another, but rather Josanna was their Mercury and before that had been Esther's tutress since childhood and had taught her not only all woman's work, such as serving, knitting, weaving, embroidering and the like, but also how

to read and write German, during which time there fell into their hands Christian books from which both garnered such yearning for the Christian religion that they resolved to accept it and to have themselves baptized; but they lacked people who might give them guidance by word and deed about how to put their salutary project into effect till he, Erasmus, had himself forsaken Judaism for Christianity, since they then not only took heart to confide in him what they had in mind, but also Esther, because of the specially good trust she had come to have in him, Erasmus, because he had become a Christian, gave him through Josanna assurance that she would marry him, provided he think of ways and means by which they might secretly, safely, and indeed in secret escape from her father (who otherwise with his considerable money with which he was able to accomplish everything else, would frustrate their plan), whereupon they decided with one another that all three of them would run away with the next fleet which would start off to Batavia in the East Indies, for which purpose Esther always kept herself provided with a good deal of money and many jewels for use in this trip which they planned; but in the meantime, said Erasmus, Elias had snatched the bread, or rather the delicious morsel of meat, right from under his nose and in so doing had also ruined, through Esther, his desire for the Christian religion, since Esther now deceived herself to be the mother of the Jewish messiah and thus very grand; and he had been told by some of his old comrades that she was being venerated just like a goddess and her child was being cared for and reared almost like a king, so that he no longer had any hope that he might get her as a wife or that she might yet convert to Christianity.

Hereupon I asked him whether he was still willing, if Esther converted to Christianity and if a good piece of money were available for her dowry, to take her and the child. He answered: "I have never in all my days seen her, since she has always been protected from men

like artistic paintings from dust and smoke; how can I buy a pig in a poke? Secondly, I should be obliged to worry, should I have her, that the memory of her Elias might have more place and love in her heart than myself. Thirdly, there might perchance be bad blood in a marriage if one or both partners remembered that someone else had plucked the first and best flower. Fourthly, 'twill be difficult to tend another's plant like one's own. Fifthly, 'twill be unlikely that the actual mother of the Jewish messiah will agree to espouse Christianity; and finally, how would I be able to escape with my bride and the fruit of her womb, toward which now the hope for salvation of the entire Jewish folk is directed, from the pursuit of Eliezar, whose money everywhere prevails by force? Accordingly, it seems to me to be dangerous to resolve to do this so quickly, unless it be that a clever fellow by means of his wise inventions is able to cautiously remove these dangerous obstacles which I fear; moreover, I should indeed like to know what manner of man that might needs be who would give to Esther, a renegade Jewess, money (and how much of it) for her dowry."

"My dear Erasmus," I said in reply, "I shall answer all the points you have brought up, no matter whether you presented them to me in earnest or, as it seems, in jest. Firstly, indeed, that you have not seen her I am more than willing to believe, for if you should have seen her and should have looked upon her beauty just a little, then you would well know that in her you were encountering no pig in a poke; indeed you would deem, for her sake and to get hold of her, everything which you call dangerous obstacles no more than sport and child's play. Believe me for sure, my dear Erasmus, she is such a woman that, were it possible for me to wed her, she should never ever come to your side. Secondly, that you should vie with Elias, for that I already know an excellent remedy, since I know how I can arrange matters so that Esther shall know and believe naught else

but that you yourself were the Elias who saddled her with the baby daughter, provided you will be able to love the child, which for my sake will not be difficult for you to do. As far as the third point is concerned, because Esther will hold you yourself to be the one who robbed her of her maidenhood, it will be up to you whether what you worry about in that same point is easy or difficult to do. And it is the same situation with the fourth point, namely if she believes that the child is hers and yours, and you love it for my sake. Fifthly, given this situation, Esther's proud conceit will dissipate by itself, namely when she believes without any doubt that she had in her arms not Elias but Erasmus, who also gave her not a male messiah but a daughter, which attests sufficiently to the fact that she has been deceived; and this perpetrated deceit will in turn spur her on anew to leave off Judaism to accept the Christian faith along with her Erasmus. Sixthly, let me worry about how to deal with Eliezar so that you as well as Esther, the child and Josanna will be brought to safety. Regarding your question about who will give over a bit of money for Esther's dowry and how much, know that I shall be that very man; for just as it behooves you to observe the salvation of her bliss and to bring her to the Christian faith, because in this case she will rely upon you and entrust to you alone the task of making it come to pass, so it is my responsibility, because I deceived her and got her the child, to provide her body together with its young fruit with nourishment as best as possible. But, my dear Erasmus, had you done what you were indebted to do, to which good fortune enticed you and the Christian religion demanded of you, namely had you made haste with Esther's conversion and built on divine assistance and providence more than you worried about flight and temporal welfare, then good, pious, innocent Esther would neither have been deceived, nor should I have become her deceiver and false Elias. But one must make the best of what's done and gone, as the old saw says:

That man is learned and is wise
 Who puts up with all he eyes.

But because for the present it cannot be done and carried out with words alone, come with me to see what money I have collected for the dowry for you both and also so that my child shall be honorably and well brought up.”

Thereupon I took Erasmus with me and showed him the 10,000 ducats, which I had snatched from Eliezar’s vault, and said: “Look you, my friend, this I give as dowry to Esther and her daughter. Now if you do not find to your taste flesh like this, which is in itself a paragon and so excellently spiced with money in the bargain, then I shall find to take your place ten others who will lick their chops at the prospect of it.”

Erasmus was astonished either at my generosity or because in all his days he had never seen so much money in cash together at one time; and when he had recovered, he swore to me that he would wed Esther, should I be able to bring it about, and would keep and rear her child like his own flesh and blood. Now when I had got his oath, I informed him how he should act in this business, and that he should command Josanna, Esther’s former trusted servant, to come to him tomorrow. I, however, on that same evening let myself be locked into Eliezar’s, indeed even into Esther’s bedchamber, where she, together with her child, an old nurse and nannie was wont to lie, where I waited till they all fell asleep. Then I took away with me the baby daughter (who was wrapped like a prince’s child in sheets and swaddling clothes embroidered in gold, pearls, and precious stones); and although Eliezar’s domicile was so well provided with locks that it would have been impossible for anyone save myself to get out, they really gave me no trouble at all, for my mandrake root opened the path for me every place, and I was so bold as to lock up nice and quietly and neatly behind me again everywhere.

I got safely with the child to my lodgings, so that no one either saw or heard me, and Erasmus had meanwhile arranged for a wet nurse to nurse the child and then waited with longing till Josanna arrived. To her he showed my little daughter in her princely swaddling, and said to her: "Dear friend, here you see both your messiah and my daughter, which, even though she be a girl, is in the power of both a Christian and her true father, not, to be sure, so as to kill her as a messiah, but rather so as to baptize her and have her brought up in the Christian religion, no matter whether Esther be of assistance or not to her Elias, who, however, for the time being is named Erasmus. What do you say to that, dear Josanna? Can you indeed still hope that it should come to pass that the girl should with time be transformed into a baby boy? I should also indeed like to know what Esther will say to it, when in the future she will see our child sitting not as a messiah in a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, but rather, as a Christian maiden, attending to her devotions in the Christian church and serving the true messiah. I advise you, because you see that the affair with your messiah is a mistake, to take up again now your heretofore formed resolve and to follow me, the sooner the better, in embracing the Christian religion; and probably when Esther, who bore this daughter not by Elias but by me, sees that she has been deceived in her foolish belief that she has borne the messiah, and then accepts holy baptism just as I did, and is willing to have me as her Elias and lawfully wedded spouse, then she may come to me within twenty-four hours. Meanwhile I beg you, go to her, tell her these thoughts of mine and ask her on my behalf to forgive me for having so nicely outwitted and deceived her, reporting that the love which I bore her would not permit me to wait till she came to me from her father's house of her own accord." Finally Erasmus gave Josanna the very same ring which Esther had given me as a token of remembrance when I was sleeping with her that last night (for to that

end I had given it into his possession), proclaiming that she should take it to Esther, for from it she would actually be able to discern that he was the daughter's true father; and when he himself came to speak with her face to face, he would also tell her, as a better sign of the truth, the conversation which occurred between her and the alleged Elias when the messiah was being forged.

Josanna well nigh lost her wits in wonderment when she saw both the child and the ring and heard Erasmus speak thus; she also gladly accepted the responsibility of delivering the message; and when she came to Eliezar's house, 'twas just at the time when the Jews were consoling Esther for the loss of her child and had persuaded her that Elias had without doubt spirited it away to himself in Paradise, when it would be brought up among the angels and would be nourished with heavenly food till it reached its maturity and was able to carry out the work of saving Israel and reestablishing a kingdom for the Jews. Now this must needs have been firmly believed by Esther as well as by all the Jewish folk who heard report of this wondrous spiriting away, since they were unable to detect that some doors, some windows, some shutters, and some locks in or about the house had been opened. But when Josanna brought Esther the ring and told her what she had heard and seen, she abjured the Jewish religion and was ashamed that she had permitted herself to be so deceived and made a fool of. She was so impatient that she was hardly able to await the coming night, in which she had decided to go over to Erasmus. She packed together as secretly as possible her treasure of gold and jewels; with it she stole away from her father's house and came hurrying to my lodgings after twilight, where Erasmus was able to welcome her and entertain her with speeches, as I had instructed him and the matter required, so that she would nevermore have dreamed that anyone save him had been the presumptive Elias and the real father of her daughter.

