

Chapter Two

Portrait of the Magician

In the midst of this, my misery and wretched state, I was walking disgruntled and in the very greatest sadness at the time when it was just coming towards the end of August, into my large garden which I had right outside the city gate; and if anyone who saw me strolling along this way had at that time been able to observe and see my great affliction of heart as well as the external appearance, which is commonly wont to agree with the inner condition, he should without doubt have concluded that I was about to hang myself, as the Chinese do, on a tree. But it turned out, praise God, better: for this was the very place where I received my first consolation, which I drew, by means of divine grace, from my own reason; namely when I considered in what fashion the crown-flowers, tulips, narcissuses, hyacinths, and other flower-bulbs were completely bereft of their beautiful embellishments, but were for all that not ruined at all, but rather lay quite fresh in the earth in the firm hope that in the coming spring they will sparkle anew again in their usual raiment. You fool, I said to myself then, if you have no reason, as a sensible person should have, and if you're lacking in wisdom and knowledge, then do learn here from these mute plants. Who knows how God, who after all has never yet denied you any good fortune, has decided to bless you again? You do, after all, still have in your hands the seed, that is the means and opportunity to plant and to harvest, just as these flower-bulbs have the nature of their growth, greater riches and treasures than you have lost. To put it briefly, my consolation, hope and good resolve abruptly became so mighty, powerful, and great that I

imagined that only now had I turned from a blind man into one who can see, from a Cyclops into an Argo. Therefore I scolded myself for having acted so foolishly over my loss, for having tormented away my life myself by nearly more than half, and what is most abominable of all, for having sought, contrary to the express commandment of God and a pious Christian's proper behavior, aid and counsel from sieve-shakers, treasure-hunters, and exorcists. Yes, I even resolved how I should atone for this mistake, and how I intended to mend my ways if I ever became rich again; *in summa summarum*, I suddenly fell into such an enterprising frame of mind as I had not been in for half a year, and into such a one which a few hours ago I durst not have imagined would ever again come to me all the days of my life. And at that time I called the time lucky when I had spent perchance a dozen sovereigns for a few flower-bulbs which now, in my greatest affliction, caused me to take a path to which the encouragement of neither my clerical nor lay friends had been able to bring me.

After this I considered what I wished to do and how I wished to arrange my transactions so that I might again really flourish, and in these thoughts I became aware of how the concern which I had hitherto had, had made me incapable of all the business dealings which prosperity requires, and what I had since then neglected; therefore I resolved henceforth to mind my house differently and to earn back everything twice as much as I had frittered away, and deep in these thoughts went back out of the garden again as cheerful as I had before been grieved and depressed when I went in, in order to forthwith go home, look to what was mine, and make a good beginning at what I had resolved to do.

But! But! How vain and void, how empty, flawed and transitory does our inconstancy make the right concepts and plans we make! 'Tis inconstancy which commonly causes us not only often not to achieve in the here and now the goods we have desired all our life

and for which we have striven in all our actions and transactions, but also even though we have often spat on our hands and boldly set to with the ax to cut out the tree of sin within us, causes us to lose eternal life, alas, eternal life!

Dear reader, how should my resolve—which was founded only on re-acquiring money and goods, but not in the least, through love for God, on changing my life for the better—be able to prevail and bring me good fruits? But in one respect, I cannot deny Inconstancy her praise either, since she often makes disconsolate people cheerful, which I learned at that time from my own experience, when I went into the garden in despair, as it were, but, contrarily, came out again joyous because of her effect on me then, not to mention that she, like a divine power and virtue as it were, also often makes rich and eminent people of the poor and scorned, lifts up the lowly, and deposes the proud.

I cannot actually say, however, whether on this occasion the change she effected was harmful or profitable to me, for look you, as soon as I stepped out the garden door I found a stumbling block which I know not what spirit had placed on the path before me and on which the resolve I had at that time, and told of above, shattered again, namely an old, haggard, bent-over little man with tiny eyes, a tiny, pointed, hooked little nose, a large gray-black beard, pale in color and clad rather shabbily. He looked at me so sadly, pityingly, and sympathetically that I could without difficulty tell from his visage that his person must needs be something special, and that in addition to that he must needs be desirous of speaking to me also about some matter of import; therefore I was unable to go past him without uttering a friendly greeting to him.

What I had imagined to myself was indeed the case, and to be sure even more so than I might have thought of him, for after a quite short exchange of words (for one remark soon leads to another), he

told me not only the loss which I had suffered, but also he knew how much of it the hurdy-gurdy girl had thrown away and had given to the baker boy, and he specified it as neatly as if he had robbed me himself and had counted the last coins as well as the sighs I had because of them.

Thus, this, I thought to myself, is the man for you, as I was astonished with wonderment, as it were, at his tale. I thought to myself: if you know this, then you know more. I therefore asked him whether it might not be possible that I should be able to get back again what was mine. "Surely," he answered, "that can well be, provided the gentleman will trust and follow me, but on the condition that since the thief robbed you no human being has yet seen what is left of the stolen money," which lay hidden a half hour's walk from here in the forest; and if I wished, he was prepared to go thither with me to fetch it, because anyway, now the propitious time was at hand to get hold of it, which time would soon pass away and in the future would never again be so suitable that one would be able to retrieve even the very least farthing of it.

Who was happier than I? For because this little man, before I asked anything of him, had told me the unmitigated truth, I was persuaded that he would not be lying to me now, either. In my mind I was already just as rich again as I had been before, and was so overjoyed that I knew not whether I was standing on my feet or my head, which made me much more inclined to go into the forest with him than a lusty wench might be to go to a dance; but I requested of him first that he let me go to my house in town for a moment to inform my wife of my absence so that she should not worry on my account; for because my unbearable sorrow was known to her, I feared that if she found me missing she would conclude that I had done harm to myself, and she would therefore herself jump into a well; which trip he at first did not at all wish to permit, but finally grudgingly

granted, with the express protestation that it would not be his fault if I should let slip away the best time to get back my treasure, with the assurance that the longer I hesitated, the less of it would be allotted to me. So I went, saw to it that my wife should be safely taken care of, and consoled her with my quick return, without in my haste telling her where I was going, what I was going to do, or how soon I would be returning. After that, I returned to the above-mentioned little man, who in the meanwhile had been working for me in the garden.

