

Chapter Four

A very serious case of spooning, in fact, nearly two of them

No one can believe or imagine to himself what strange and odd crotchets and plans I had on the way as I walked homeward, in how many ways and how many places, namely, I wished to make my invisibility profitable to me. There, with my thoughts, I was already invisibly present personally at the conferences and secret negotiations of the one or the other company of most distinguished merchants, and listening to what they planned in regard to trade and to wares of one kind or another, so as to make use of it for myself, and because I did deem myself not the least among the merchants of our land, to cut my sails to their wind so that I should again be wealthy, even wealthier than I had been before. To just such purposes I not only went to the meetings of our city council, but also even was party to the secret state councils and discussions of mighty potentates, so as to learn there to my advantage what was decided about war and peace and how, in accordance with these, trade and prices for wares would increase or decrease accordingly.

In such thoughts I prized myself so happy and saw my future prosperity so excellent that I myself was well nigh unable to believe that I was invisible, by which means I intended to become so happy and rich. I thought to myself often: what if, however, this necromancer perchance has done to you what the two painters in Boccaccio did to a simple-minded ninny when they persuaded him too, laden down with a heavy sack full of stones, that he was invisible, till his wife to his utter chagrin bade him welcome? Therefore I often put aside my handkerchief to make really sure of my invisibility, till

finally I became aware that not only did the wild songbirds which I encountered on the way not shy away from me, but also that, especially when I came into town, even the people, both those whom I knew and those whom I did not, neither greeted me nor, as I had come to expect, doffed their hats to me, not to mention that no beggar demanded alms of me, from which I then became sufficiently assured that in truth no one saw me.

Therefore I went in good cheer first of all to my house, mainly to see how my servants were behaving in my absence. My dear little wife I found, to my way of thinking, far more disconsolate than I had ever in all my life seen her, especially since she without surcease heaved one sigh after the other, from which anyone could discern without difficulty the magnitude of her concern; and because I could imagine naught but that she was without doubt both worried about my former concern and anxious because of my absence, I took this to be a certain and infallible sign of her heartfelt love for me, which pleased me not a little; indeed so refreshed me that I thought I now had received sufficient amusement from what was tied up in my handkerchief to make up for my lost money; and even if someone at that time had wished to give me even as much for it as I had lost, I should not have exchanged it with anyone. Now just as it tickled me excellently that my wife loved me so much, on the other hand I also had great sympathy with the attested anxiety with which she was obliged to be patient on my account because of this love, so that I should have really let myself be seen by her, both to console her and to make her happy with my presence, which she so heartily desired, had I not also wished, while invisible, to examine my servants in regard to their behavior.

To this end I sneaked around everywhere in the house and found that each was going about his business as faithfully as he had hitherto been wont to do. For nearly three hours, till on toward evening,

I kept watch in my shop next to the money-box into which they were wont to put the daily receipts, in order to see whether my shop-clerks, of whom I had three different ones, were not playing me false; whether in selling they were exact, in receiving money careful, and were industrious in putting the money, down to the last farthing, in its proper place, but was unable to detect the slightest thing which should move me to dismay, for I found them to be as I wished to have them.

And so I also lurked in the kitchen to see how things were going there, as well as in the cellar, but found in both places nothing unusual going on which might have caused me great damage, save that the housekeeper filled for herself as well as for the cook a mug with my costly Neckar wine (after she had first taken a rather large swig of it) and afterwards made the keg full again by pouring table wine into it, which, to be sure, did not greatly vex me, because it did no particularly great harm to my fortune, even though it would somewhat reduce the excellent taste quality of my Neckar wine if they treated it that way many times. The cook, however, I saw put her hand in a spot the reader can easily guess in order to pursue lice, and saw her take several of them captive (some of whom she sent into exile, but some of whom she even executed), and afterwards muck about in the raw as well as the cooked foods with her unwashed hands. But how could I hold this against the poor ninny? It was, after all, in the heat of August, when these varmints plague everyone (not just the fair sex). Besides, women say, "Sausage is fattening." Also: "What you don't know can't hurt you." Nevertheless, I began to feel more like throwing up than eating as I saw her hunting and murdering, and saw how, with her fingernails still bloody, she reached into the spice-and-salt-box to make the foods more tasty.

From there I sneaked back to my beloved, whom I found in her boudoir in a much more lamentable state than the first time, for she

was crying so that one tear followed the other, and from constantly wiping them away she had her *mouchoir* so drenched that you might wring it out; I had unbelievable sympathy with her delicate pale cheeks which, because of my absence, she was inundating with these tears of anguish; for in truth, were she to have known of my presence, she would probably not have either shown her heart's concern or made so open a show of it.

Finally she said with a deep sigh: "O Amor, thou grim tyrant! If there is then no other medicine or remedy to be rid of thy unbearable cruelty, unless it be that I have the beloved person himself in my arms, then I shall be obliged to make so bold as to do something which God would never bid me do!"

I thought to myself, "Now it is high time that you quickly take pity on this aggrieved soul, reveal yourself to her to her consolation, turn away her pain, rescue her from total despair, and revive her spirits with your highly pleasing presence!" And I should have straightway thrown my handkerchief aside so that she might be able to see me, had I not thought that there would be time enough for that, should she take to hand a knife or a rope to put an end to her life, especially since if she did start to do herself in, the unforeseen rescue from her direst need would make her subsequent joy many times greater.

Meanwhile the time for the evening meal arrived, the table was set, my servants assembled there, and my wife dried her eyes and cheeks, and also seemed much more cheerful than I had envisioned that she would soon be; but all the same, she did not wish to eat anything, for she was so full of sorrow that unfortunately, Lord help us, she wished nothing.

Now when I had with joy perceived the change which came over my wife and judged from it that for the time being she was not going to hang herself on my account and that it would therefore be unnecessary for me, in order to cut her down, to stay constantly at her

side to prevent her suicide, look you, I resolved to keep an eye on my servants and to see what they would do between supper and bedtime, for I must confess that in such matters I am rather suspicious; and, dear reader, who wouldn't be toward such people as man the plow or the oar which feeds us and who through their faithfulness and industry could soon make one rich, or, on the contrary, if they are rascallions through wasteful negligence, laziness, and unfaithfulness could quickly ruin one and put him in the red.

Therefore I looked in on all of them save the housekeeper, who generally had to work every twenty-four hours till eleven o'clock at night till she had done all her duties and arranged one thing and the other for the next day; for she was quite industrious, the last one in bed and the first one up out of it early in the morning, and therefore the watchful eye of my household, or the pole star by which the rest of the servants were obliged to set their course. She, however, had a position of so much trust because she was my wife's cousin, since she was related to her in about the thirty-second or third degree. And for that very reason it was necessary for me to pay the closest heed to her on whom, as it were, all the prosperity of my family depended; for I thought to myself: if this watchful Martha and busy overseer of my house is faithful, then all the other servants cannot but cooperate in furthering your prosperity.

She acted in a way I was glad to see, and therefore I was quite willing to overlook the fact that she was on such intimate terms with my Neckar wine. After she was about to go to bed, however, and I had sneaked after her (especially since heretofore I had suspected that my middle clerk had become smitten with her, and also because I could not believe either that so rare a beauty as she was possessed of could live without carnal love, that is without suitors and the prickings of her own flesh), look you, there stood my aforementioned clerk in her way (whom I had found begging and taken in because of his

good figure and physiognomy, in the hopes of having something decent in him) and was waiting for her. He was not, to be sure, going in white, as those ghosts are wont to appear in houses of whom it is said that when they walk abroad it means that the housemaids will get fat bellies, but rather he was clad and dressed up as if he had intended to stroll about like a dandy in town on a holiday; in addition, he was armed with his sword at his side and had on his deer-leather winter-ball gloves, just as if he had intended to fight in single combat with a dueler. I could not imagine what this attire and his presumable going out at night might mean, but I imagined to myself that he might be intending to go somewhere either with companions to a feast or to the light of his life, in which case my purse must needs do well by him, because he himself had no money, and even save his fine garments had nothing else in wages from me. But before I, in order to fathom his intent, was able to trouble myself with further reflection, my cousin, the housekeeper, asked him where he thought to go so late, since he knew that she had locked up the house and he would not be able to get out of it unless he had a skeleton key to open it with, which she sincerely thought was not the case.

“’Tis you! ’Tis you! Abode of my life! on which my mind, soul, and even the decision either to live or die depends!” he answered. “O God forbid! What are you saying?” said my housekeeper thereupon. “How can you talk so strangely? God gave you life, that I shall not take from you. Go instead to your bed and leave off this foolishness, or I swear to you, should you make so bold as to touch me in the least, I shall raise such a cry that you shall clap your hands over your head at it. How dare you presume to dream of defiling your master’s house in the person of his cousin, your master who, after all, has overwhelmed you with so many kindnesses? I shall spare you because you are his servant whom he loves; else I should shortly bring it to pass that he chase you off again despite St. Valentine, whereas

contrarily the continuation of your good behavior in his house may bring to you great good fortune and honor? So act sensibly and consider a moment what you are doing!”

“The devil take me, body and soul” (may God protect me and the dear reader), he answered, “should I find that I am not to partake of your love, if I do not immediately, look you here (whereupon he gripped his sword by the handle) plunge this cold steel forthwith into my heart, which is indeed consumed by the flames of love, and thereby deprive you of your most faithful lover and at the same time my body of its life.”

Thereupon he drew from its sheath his cruel frog-sticker, his bloodthirsty sword I meant to say, which I rightly call cruel because it was not willing to spare its own master’s life, and therewith assumed a posture, as Saul may perchance have stood when he fell on his own sword. Now as I stood there, and the housekeeper, however, started to speak to prevent this pitiable suicide, my wife gave a signal with her little bell, which meant that the housekeeper should come to her immediately. She obeyed quickly, and I followed, tiptoeing after her, both of us leaving the enamored fool in his fit, whether he might do away with himself or not.

