Chapter Five

The invisible man sees the groundwork laid to a structure with which horns were to be placed on his head

The housekeeper went to my wife in her boudoir, and I slipped in after her. To her my wife gave a sealed little letter with instructions to take it early in the morning at daybreak to her cousin the apothecary and to learn where she should go to fetch the wares ordered in the note. She accepted both the note and the command obediently, as was her duty, but hesitated to go off with it straightway, for which reason my wife bade her to do so. But she was loath to and said: "Dear sweet cousin, forgive me if I have reservations, for the preservation of my honor, about obeying you now as a servant should; for our Freddie (that was the name of my middle clerk) was lying in wait for me just now on the way when I was about to go to bed, and, with the threat to do away with himself should I not follow him, imputed to me things which neither he nor I have the right to do. I believe too that had our Lord God not put it in your mind to ring for me, I know not what sort of misfortune might perchance have occurred." My curious wife thereupon wished to know in detail the entire sequence of events, which the housekeeper indeed quite candidly told her; she, however, thereupon answered: "Tis true enough that no person who has not yet experienced it can believe how miserably love torments one; but nevertheless, the wanton lickspittle should keep a better hold on himself, and in a house into which he was taken out of pity should think better of making so bold as to behave so outrageously toward a cousin of the house. I must confess, dear cousin, that I too am enamored unto death and hardly know how to bear such pangs of love during the absence of my husband." Upon ending these

words she thereupon again began to weep, so that it must move, if not the housekeeper's heart, then at least a heart of stone to take pity upon this woman in love. Meanwhile I saw the draft of the note to the apothecary lying on my wife's table; it read verbatim as follows:

> Most honored and appropriately heartfelt beloved cousin, etc. You know without my further reminding you in what miserable melancholy my most beloved husband has passed his days since we lost our money, which so pains me, as his closest relative, indeed as his body's most faithful rib, that in the long run I fear I cannot bear it; for which reason then, instead of sleeping, I torment myself with musing about whether no expedient may be found to cure this illness of his, whereupon it then occurred to me, the best medicine would be if you, cousin, would prepare for me along with a good piece of marchpane a few dozen macaroons, some with citronate in them and others with the sort of things which strengthen the heart, and mix them with strong substances which are so constituted as to not only dispel the harmful melancholy humors and purify the ill blood, but also to arouse a natural desire, and I am sure you will well understand me. I shall then give him this confection, which he loves anyway, and through amiability first get his mind off his lost money and onto me, and thus expeditiously bring him back to his senses again so that little by little he can put his hand to his trade as heretofore and gradually forget about what he has lost. But your advice, dear cousin, which shall remain between us, and your dexterity, which I shall trust, will be best. With kindest regards as ever, etc.

All the while I was reading this, the housekeeper was saying to my wife to console her: "O, cousin, what cause have you to weep?

Can you not bear to be separated from your dear husband this one night?" "What?" said my wife thereupon, "this one night? You may believe for sure that he has scarcely touched me for longer than four weeks now! He lies the whole night and can do naught but sigh for his lost money; from which I must needs deduce that he loves it more than me. He is worrying himself sick and so weakening his strength that in the future he'll make himself quite incompetent to perform a man's chore as a man should. What do you think, dear cousin, what sort of pleasure does a poor wife like me have from such a wooden lord 'n master?" The housekeeper answered: "As one who as yet knows nothing of menfolk, I know, to be sure, nothing to contradict what you say, but it seems to me your husband is such an upright, esteemed, and friendly gentleman that if a man like him were to be granted me, I should not exchange him for any other man in the entire world, much less wish to do so." "Yes, dear little cousin," said my wife thereupon, "before when I was still in your condition, I thought the same way you do; but back then my husband was a completely different fellow than he is now. Back then he loved me more than all the business in the entire world; but now he sighs only for his lost money, which can't be gotten back with sighs after all, and puts his wife out to pasture. About Freddie, don't you worry at all, and consider it a fairy tale when he says he is going to do away with himself unless you accommodate yourself to his desires. 'Tis the plain truth and nothing new at all when these wanton birds act that way, first to make us poor stupid simple women full of fear and sympathy and in the end to make off with our maidenheads, as unfortunately, already many a maid who let herself be moved to pity that way, with irretrievable damage and loss of her most precious jewel, namely her virginity, has learned. Just think naught else but that that bird (without having done any harm to himself, or even having ever had it in mind to do any) is now lying in his bed again and thinking up new

traps to set so that in the future he may delude the game which this time, contrary to his hopes, escaped him. And even if such a lewd stud were as earnest as he pretends to be, so that he actually did what he threatened to, it would still be better and more responsible for a maiden if she let such a fool, if that is what he wished, go to the devil alone than for her to embark on a path on which (not to mention the shame which she may perchance expect in the here and now) she will play the role of his companion on that journey."

It is said of the women of Holland that they (particularly in the trade dealings of merchants) are much slyer, cleverer, and cannier than men in many other places are; but I can assure you that I found my wife much craftier and more cunning than the women of Holland could ever be. Just hear how the malicious beast so nicely shuffled her cards.

She had in her boudoir a bed barely big enough for two people on which she often was wont to spend the day lolling about and in which she slept at night when I was not home. She bade the housekeeper lie down in it, although she said that she took it to be certain that on the way to her own bed she would have nothing more to fear from Freddie this night; and thereupon she began in earnest to discourse with her about the cruel and unbearable passion of love and to paint it so nicely for her that it seemed as if she had been studying naught but this all her livelong days; and after she thought that through wide-ranging digressions and solid reasons she had now made the housekeeper sufficiently amenable to her purpose, she reported to her in what measure she had for a long time now been enamored of a studiosus who the past week had been awarded the degree of doctor of medicine (O mirum! How I felt in my heart when I heard that!), which scholar she would never again be able to banish from her mind, even if she were to carry the memory of him to her grave; thereupon, amidst pleas, tears, and sighs, she made her unbelievable promises if she would keep this love of hers a secret and be of assistance to her so that she might enjoy her beloved doctor.

I must confess that the housekeeper resisted for a long time before she was able to resolve to let herself be used for this purpose, till she was finally won over by both pleas and promises and let herself be persuaded to promise to be faithful and obedient to her in this business; thereupon she told her that in the note to the apothecary she had ordered some confections which she was to take tomorrow to the doctor, because it was his name day, and present to him in her name; also, tomorrow morning she was to dress a pair of fat Geneva capons and from the one have the cook prepare a pie with rosewater, little raisins, and other spices, and have the other one stuffed and roasted. After that she wrote a little letter to the doctor with the following content:

My most revered doctor and even more, my dear friend, beloved from the bottom of my heart:

The ever-present thought of the hope, which your good reason and excellence has aroused in me, to enjoy at some time in the future your well-known expertise in medicine reminded me that this day is dedicated to your dear name, on which day one friend is ever wont to confirm his friendship for the other with a gift, and to express the heartfelt wish that he live happily to see many more such days, which custom I too wish to observe in accordance with your merits, and herewith fulfill my obligation from the bottom of my heart, with the humble request that you accept the accompanying collation in the spirit in which it was sent you and thus enjoy it for my sake. Even though my husband is not home now and it is therefore unseemly of me to invite strange men into my abode, an indisposition I am now suffering nonetheless requires the kind of cure for which I should be loath to

dispense with the assistance and medicine of my deeply darling beloved doctor and therefore request in the most friendly way that you be so kind as to betake yourself to me after sundown. In expectation of your arrival, which will bring me such joy I remain ever

My darling beloved doctor's faithful servant.
N.N.

Date: August 25th etc.

Now even though in this note my lewd wife did not announce in detail where the shoe was pinching her, nevertheless the doctor, were such a note to come to him, would easily have been able to grasp it, unless he were a eunuch or even a fool, and not a doctor. After concluding and sealing it, she also lay down beside the housekeeper and instructed her further as to how she was to behave tomorrow on her embassade, and in conclusion she took her in her arms, hugged her, and said: "Tomorrow at this time I hope, unless my husband comes home, to have the doctor in my arms like this." I however thought to myself: Just you wait till then, and I'll fix your wagon; thereupon I sat down in my easy chair in which in the summertime I was wont to sleep sitting up for an hour after dinner, and plotted there the entire night how, by thoroughly humiliating my wife (but in such fashion that no one else got wind of it) I might destroy and extinguish this new and budding love in its first glow, and before it broke out in quite inextinguishable flames; and it was indeed necessary that I do it, for I was dealing with a handsome young doctor and with the most cunning and sly wife on the entire earth, with whom artfulness was required to deceive them both.