

Chapter Six

One good turn for another, and a gratuity for the maid

I, to be sure, had not closed an eye that entire night, and yet I was just as ready to go to the apothecary's shop as was the housekeeper, who had got her night's sleep; for the apothecary was related to me and my wife's cousin only through me; moreover, he had forever and always been my trusted bosom friend and my schoolmate since childhood, so that I could think of no one better than him to be more loyal to me than to my wife (whom I on this occasion wished to betray with his help) in this matter in which I could not well dispense with his services.

At that time I saw the housekeeper naked and found her to be so lovely, so beautiful, so attractive, and so well proportioned and shapely that I could not blame Freddie for losing his heart to her; but I thought that despite this I should not let this sweet morsel come to him untasted, for I straightway decided to avenge my wife's infidelity, which, to be sure, she only had in mind, by really doing to the housekeeper what my wife planned to let the doctor do to her, even though otherwise I had always been faithful to my afore-mentioned wife and had never in all my livelong days had in mind showing her such infidelity either.

But who else was responsible for this but my beautiful wife, who had tempted me, as it were, by exhibiting this beautiful woman to me, and without doubt had gotten the good maiden hot and bothered with her discourse about adultery and her own first steps to actually commit it? I went out of my wife's boudoir with her and watched with pleasure as she wrung the capons' necks, looking forward to

how we were going to devour them so merrily with one another. Now before she gave the cook orders about what she should do with them and get ready to go to the apothecary's shop, I preceded her and arrived just as the apothecary's clerks were opening the apothecary's shop and were busy setting the decorations on the counters. I, to be sure, came into the house invisibly, but after I had seen a corner where I was sure that my handkerchief, together with its invisibility, would lie in safety, I put it down, let myself be seen, and asked for the master of the house; he was still in bed sound asleep.

Because I was wont to take more liberties in this place because of the intimacy between the apothecary and me than if I had grown up in the house, I woke him up, took him to his upper chamber, and recounted to him all the dealings of my wife. I kept nothing from him save alone this: that I was able to make myself invisible; indeed, I even confided to him the plan I had in mind, not only to thwart my wife nicely through deceit, but also to repay her with another woman for the infidelity which she had resolved to show me. Now that was just his cup of tea, for he was the sort of fellow whose heart leaped for joy when he was able to help someone carry out something of this sort.

The first thing that he did was to command his servants to keep my presence secret; after that he had almonds made into the marchpane which my wife was going to order; of biscuits, macaroons, Nuremberg Lebkuchen, and the like, he had enough on hand anyway. But for my wife's pleasure, to give her in the bargain, he made a dozen macaroons which he mixed excellently with saltpeter such as should be suitable for cooling her heated kidneys. Everyone in the apothecary shop was obliged to work, so that my wife should not be hindered from honoring us with a fine feast; the marchpane he decorated all over with flaming hearts with an arrow through them, with

clasped hands, and the sort of fantasies which lovers wear on their escutcheons. The verses around the edge were as follows:

My love for you
Each day blooms new.

And during this labor he and I waited for the housekeeper with great longing.

She finally came, an hour or an hour and a half after me, with the note pinned to her. But alas, what a misfortune! In her haste the poor thing had snatched up the wrong one, namely the one on which was written "To be delivered by hand to Doctor Louis Adolphi." The apothecary, who was a sly rogue, said: "Just come right in with me, miss," and meanwhile broke open the note as if in haste as it were, but so that he did not damage the seal, despite the fact that he well knew in advance and had learned from me what was in it. Now when he had led the bearer of the note off to the side away from his servants and was about to begin reading the letter, he said: "Odds blood, miss, what have you done? I thought you had a note to give to me, but I well see that it was meant for a doctor. What shall we do? It's been opened now!" At that my housekeeper became quite flustered and as red all over as a glowing coal. "Now, now, miss," said the apothecary, "You mustn't be so frightened: if you also have one for me, just give it here. I'll be sure that I seal the one to the doctor again so that he shan't notice it." Thereupon she pulled out of her bag the one written to him; he however, said to her, "So that you, miss, may see that I have no desire to know your mistress' secrets, come upstairs with me and observe that I'll not even read it, but seal it up again so that you'll be out of danger on that score." And so he brought her to me in the upper chamber.

You can well imagine how frightened the good wench was when she unexpectedly saw me standing before her, and at the same time

the apothecary holding the two notes in his hands. The latter threw them on the table and said: "Look you, wench. There is your master; you can come to terms with him; I have other things to do." And with that he went out of the chamber, locked the door behind him, and stuck the key in his pocket.

I know not who of us two at the beginning had the most to do with the other, she with me in begging me to pardon her, or I with her in consoling her. But after she had gotten her wits back together a little, I held up to her both my wife's and her own crime, and put it to her that the former should have been punished with death, and her own with at least a public flogging; but, if I were to take into consideration the effect of love, then I should be able to forgive them both; thereupon I told her a whole wagonload of lies about how much I had long been passionately enamored of her, the housekeeper, and yet had concealed my pangs of love and, for the sake of my wife's honor, love, and fidelity, had borne them with wretched patience. But now that I had caught her with her hand in another's pocket and saw with my own eyes that she wished to reward my fidelity with infidelity and wished to kick over the traces, then it was to be hoped that it would not be held against me if I were to give full rein to my desires and pay my wife in her own coin. I thereupon approached her too with such charming gestures as the nature of my situation at that time demanded, and charmed her with such great promises, namely that in the future I intended to keep her alone for my most dearly beloved, before all other women in the entire world, and should in time care for her as befitted my great wealth, till finally she yielded to my kisses and said: "I well see that my maidenhead is predestined to be lost in these twenty-four hours. From one who intended to do away with himself on my account I saved it only last night, but now it will be lost because of my own oversight. But I should rather grant

it to such a man as you are, cousin, than to a wanton deceiver who is unworthy of it.”

In such fashion I obtained what I desired, and did to my wife what she had in mind to do to me. But what indeed do you think the great Judge will say to this on the great day? To this you will say with better reasons than the high priests in Jerusalem said to Judas (Matt 27:4) “See thou to that!” This was the least fruit of my invisibility; afterwards there came far more terrible exploits, so that of me the saying was indeed true:

The longer I act thus, the deeper I fall,
Till there is in me no goodness at all.

But that is just the way it is when, because of accursed goods and gold, one forgets God and His word, not to mention when one uses magicians’ help to obtain them. I thought at the time when I brought this innocent, simple-minded, and pious lamb to a fall that I had arranged everything well and had taken fine revenge on my wife, the wretched instrument; but had I obeyed the divine injunctions of my good angel in the garden when I was observing the flower-bulbs in the earth stripped of their embellishment, I should have acted in a wiser and more Christian manner, and ’twould nevermore have gone so far with either me or my wife, much less with this poor maiden; had I left the itinerant scholar to practice his magic as long as he wished without me, then I should not have become, in setting out on this path of sin, an adulterer and a seducer of virgins at one and the same time.

At this time, however, I did not think so far, but was rather intent only on how I might put into effect the trick which I also wanted to play on my wife; and the while I did not forbear either to repeat several more times with my housekeeper what I had first done with her; and when she, with tears in her eyes, revealed to me her fear

that she might as a result perchance come to number herself among the mothers, I consoled her with the advice that she should, when she remarked that to be the case, then betimes permit our Freddy to come in to play the father.

Meanwhile the apothecary had finished his marchpane that we gave to the housekeeper to take with her and instructed her how she should persuade my wife that she had been obliged to wait so long for it in order to be able to show it to her, for the apothecary had said that if that which he had just made was not pleasing to her, then because of other chores he would not be able to make any other for her before nightfall. We also gave her back the note to le Monsieur Docteur Louis sealed up to take home with her, so that, should the woman perchance ask after it, she would not fall apart as butter does in the sun, and when we thought that she would scarcely have reached my house, look you, there she came back to fetch the other confections. Now even though I thought without doubt that I had won the housekeeper over with my friendliness and considerable promises so that she could not but be loyal to me, I nevertheless gave her in addition and also for her maidenhead a half dozen ducats so that she should actually come to us with what my wife would command her to take to the doctor and should leave the rest for me to take care of. She promised to do this, and kept her promise too, since not long thereafter she came trundling into the apothecary's back garden gate, which we had left open for her to this end, laden down with a heavy basket full of delectables and a bottle full of my Neckar wine. And so everything went according to my wishes, since my wife had received at home the macaroons which had been made with saltpeter as a gift for her, and which dainties we had damaged by crumbling them here and there to this end, and had thus made unseemly for a fine present.