

Chapter Seven

How one makes women a delicacy repugnant to women

Now, while my housekeeper had been away, the apothecary and I had finished in the name of the doctor the following note in reply to my wife, which the apothecary, because his handwriting and seal were unknown to my wife, had written and in good and proper amatory fashion had enveloped with silk and closed with a completely golden seal; whereupon we sat down together merrily with my new lady-love, made short shift of the capon pie together with the roast capon and the confections, and drank hearty toasts from the bottle of Neckar wine, to a happy decline of my wife's doctorly love. The note, however, went as follows:

Most noble, much honored and virtuous, most highly esteemed madame, etc.:

With what most obedient deference and respect I received your lovely little letter, the bearer of this reply has seen, but 'twill be impossible for her to describe to you, most highly esteemed madame, with what inward heartfelt joy I found myself favored and overwhelmed when I learned from it that my unworthy person had been deemed worthy to be accepted as your servant and personal physician, even though she has seen how passionately and devotedly I kissed both the dearest little letter and also, with what sweet palpitations of my heart, the little ring. I shall, however, give an oral account of this myself upon my unfailing arrival at the appointed time, and shall, I hope, at the same time show you by

my deeds, most highly esteemed madame, how willing and anxious I am to wait most obediently upon you. But you, in keeping with your keen mind, will discern how suspicious the world today is, and how ready envious folks' poisonous tongues are not to spare innocence itself of calumny. Now, so that, in this instance, we both may avoid all danger, I beg you most humbly, highly esteemed madame, to be so kind as to arrange it so that there is no light on hand anywhere upon my arrival and departure for home, since otherwise I should be loath to betake myself to you at night, and especially because my art is so reliable that it is well able to dispense with it anyway, since I, without boasting, can report that by merely feeling the pulse I know how to detect more, judge, and prescribe suitable medicine than many another who must needs judge from a patient's color and other circumstances. Finally, I wish the dear sun a speedier dispatch on this occasion than is its usual one, so as to thank you all the sooner, most honored milady, for your generous present, and at the same time to appear in person with pleasant demonstrations of my obedience, till which time I am

My most highly esteemed lady's
Most faithful servant
D. Ludovicus Adolphi

Now, when it seemed to me to be the proper time, I sent my housekeeper home with her empty basket, and this note, and gave her another ducat to show to my wife and to persuade her that the doctor had compelled her, as it were, to accept it as a gift, and had said in so doing that he had never in his livelong days so enjoyed being remembered on his name day; therefore it was only right that

she be given an honest messenger's wages. I also instructed her in yet many other things, such as lies she was to tell my wife about the doctor's desire for her; especially, that she make absolutely sure that upon my arrival there be no light at hand; and told her too how she was then to believe in other regards, even when I was about to go away again. Now, only when she was about to part from me did she recall that my wife had given her a ring to deliver to the doctor along with the victuals, which ring she therewith put at my disposal. Now it was a ruby worth about six Imperial sovereigns, and I should have gladly permitted my new lady-love to keep it, had it not straightway occurred to me to give my wife a black eye with it, which plan I also confided to my new darling, the housekeeper, in order, in so doing, to excuse myself to her; with which plan she seemed better satisfied than had I permitted her to keep the ring for herself.

That same afternoon what I did was this: first, I had myself barbered so that I might resemble the doctor, who looked quite the swain, if not completely by day, at least by night somewhat around about the mouth; secondly, I secretly procured, through the apothecary's servants, a doctor's robe, so as to wait upon my wife in it in the place of the doctor; thirdly, the apothecary was obliged to prepare for me a harmless little liquid purgative, which, to be sure, I had less need of than a sound man has of a crutch; fourthly, I persuaded him to give a banquet in his house the following day at my expense and to invite to it as guests both the doctor and me and my wife. To this end I drafted for him the following letter to the doctor, which the apothecary afterwards copied and forthwith sent off to him together with the ring which my wife had wished to send to him (since I gave it to him for this purpose):

Noble and most learned doctor:

In consideration of the fact that even and always apothecaries have held it to be their duty humbly to lend a helping hand to doctors of medicine, their greatest patrons and supporters, by displaying the highest respect for their office and showing them every consideration, I have made so bold as to also humbly initiate herewith official relations with Your Excellency, and to heartily wish Your Excellency, in light of the professional title and dignity recently conferred upon you, all good fortune, health, and even all the prosperity and welfare you desire, and further, to present to you in remembrance of your name day today the enclosed memorial ring, with the most humble request that Your Excellency be so magnanimous as to be, and remain in the future, the esteemed patron of my unworthy person, the least of your servants, and take the trouble tomorrow forenoon to inspect my apothecary shop, and to magnanimously correct, by means of your revered wisdom, esteemed advice and instruction, whatever defects and shortcomings may be found there, and to do me the honor of being my cherished guest at the subsequent noonday meal of roast and whatever else kitchen and cellar can provide; which hoped-for great courtesy from Your Excellency I for my part humbly and throughout all the days of my life shall be at pains to deserve, since I have once and for all firmly decided and resolved to be and to remain, as long as I live,

Your Excellency's:

Faithful and obedient servant

N.N. Apothecary of the Silver Unicorn

“Odds bodkins, cousin,” said the apothecary first off, “you’ve gone much too far, and the doctor will think I am a fool.” “No, no,” said I, “the madder the brewing, the better the beer. The little ring will take care of everything and put you in the doctor’s good graces. Just let matters take their course, especially since the ring seems to be predestined to be a present for the doctor; accordingly ’tis better and more pleasing to me that you, cousin, get a few prescriptions sent to your shop because of it than that I receive a pair of horns in return for it, which would without doubt be the case, should it come to him from my wife’s hands.” But so that my wife might proceed with her plan all the more surely and confidently, I hired a fellow who in return for a small gratuity went to my house and persuaded her that he had encountered me at N., three miles from there, where I had commanded him to wish her good day from me and to tell her that she should not worry that I had not come home the night before; some business had come up, because of which I might not be coming home before tomorrow.

Now, when evening drew nigh, I put on my borrowed doctor’s robe and prettified myself as much as possible, and whereas I rubbed my outside with civet and all manner of precious balms, so that I smelled as if half the apothecary shop were marching along with me. I further swallowed the above-mentioned liquid purgative in order to transform this pleasing odor, to honor and please my wife, into the worst possible stench.

Thus outfitted I came to my house, and at the appointed time found not only the door open, but also my beloved heart’s darling standing behind it in the dark, as I desired. She bade me a friendly welcome, as can easily be supposed, and in so doing pressed my hand in such measure that even a dolt would have remarked what illness she wished to be cured of. I was quick to respond to this mute

language, and we understood one another so well that we fell to kissing sooner than to words, as it were; in short, we exchanged otherwise few compliments with one another, rather she led me into a chamber which she had prepared for this purpose on the ground floor so that His Excellency need not climb any stairs in the dark; there she helped me undress and served me better than I dared all my days hope of her or ever expect of her.

One can well imagine that we straightway thereafter went to bed with one another. I, to be sure, had put in a rather hard day's work that day, but there was nevertheless sufficient powers still left so that I was able to graze on my own meadow; I know not whether they were strengthened by my wife's extraordinary friendliness or by the magnificent odor of the civet and balm, or because the apothecary had perchance mixed a little aphrodisiac in with my purgative, which, however, the rascal was never willing to admit to me.

But my wife's joy unfortunately did not last long! For after this cohabitation the little drink I had taken began to rumble in my stomach, and I tossed and turned and acted as if I must needs die of the unbearable pain. I bewailed my misfortune and lamented in particular that this had struck me just now at such an unfortunate time in which I had expected to have joy and delight, and as I tossed back and forth, now stretching out full length, now curling up again like a worm, she did not forbear to console me most sweetly amidst tears and sighs. And I cannot believe that more sympathetic words could be devised and uttered so movingly by a compassionate soul than my wife uttered then. I, however, continued to play my role, with woe-is-mes and whimpers, till the medicine was ready to work and made pretensions of exiting by force; then I was able at one turn to twist, curl, and direct myself so nicely that my gun came to be pointed directly at her face; then I pulled the trigger with terrible violence, and during the ensuing salvo was able to point and to turn

the firearm in such a way that neither her face, neck, breasts, nor belly remained unsoiled. But with that my wailing still did not stop; rather, after I had fired on her a few more times, I whisked out of the bed and began to lament again anew, and told her bluntly that she was an adulterous whore and without doubt also a witch, who had invited me here to take my life, and finally I took her by the forelock and hammered her visage wretchedly with my fists till I myself thought that for the time being it was enough; she, however, suffered all of it with patience and without any outcry, save that she now and then said: "Alas, what a poor unfortunate woman I am!" But had I, under normal circumstances, greeted her with a box on the ears that she deserved ten times as much, she would surely have raised such a hue and cry that you would still be able to hear her growling this very moment.

After this jest, I hastily dressed again and went back to where I had come from, namely to my cousin, the apothecary, to whom I was well-nigh unable to relate what I had done, so hard was I laughing. The housekeeper afterwards told me how covered with shit and battered and bruised she had found my wife after my departure; also in what fashion she had washed off the filth with cold water and used a medicament so that one should not see the bruises from the blows to the face she had received. I arranged with the apothecary that he should have me and my wife fetched the next day in a coach (and driven) to the meal; for I feared that she might be ashamed to show herself in public so well scarred; with that I took my leave and, as I had desired, left the house without any to-do before daybreak so that I might take my handkerchief with me together with its invisibility without anyone observing me.

