

Chapter Eight

An artful fence to prevent strange bulls from getting in your stall or cuckoos from laying their eggs in your nest

Thereupon I betook myself, when the gates of the city were opened, out to my garden, more to put my handkerchief in the little garden house for safe-keeping and to thus take off my invisibility than to do anything else in it. But at about nine o'clock I went home again and found my wife still resting in bed from the hard night she had gone through. I expressed wonderment, crossing myself, when I saw her so nicely banged up, and asked her what I knew better than she herself did, namely by what she had been so wretchedly disfigured in the, after all, short time of my absence. "O, dearest heart," answered the lying crow bait, "yesterday I wished to hang some white linen up on our upper story, and when I put up this ladder to this end, it slid out at the bottom so that I fell in a heap along with it and finally even down the stairs, which nearly cost me my life." I began scolding mightily, and said: "Wherefore do I keep a pool of maidservants in the house if you are going to do everything yourself. How do they earn their wages and keep? I've a good mind to take a cudgel and teach them to help their mistress better the next time." In particular I pretended to be very upset with the housekeeper, whose duty it rightly was more than the others to take better care of her cousin so that such misfortunes might be avoided, threatening to chase her the hell away if she did not show more concern for her in the future; my wife, however, excused her in every way possible and swore instead that she had not in the least been at fault in her misfortune, even though I knew better than she that this hide-tanning had been prepared and carried out on her with her cooperation. Finally, I left off

my assumed rage so that I might have time to look to my wife all the more consolingly. I compelled her to get out of bed under the pretext that I feared that coagulated blood may have collected somewhere or other which might in the future cause her great distress or even put her in danger of losing her life, which coagulated blood, before it dried completely must needs be broken up and mixed with good blood by the patient's walking back and forth; in truth, however, I was afraid she might stay in bed and not come to the apothecary's meal, and thereby then hinder and destroy my plan, together with the profit and pleasure I hoped to obtain from it.

For just that reason I helped her get dressed and get up; I treated her as gently as a new-born babe; all I said came out full of sympathy and sweeter than sugar, and the terms of address I used with her were all of this sort: "O my heart! My life! My treasure! My soul! My consolation!" etc. Thereby I got her back on such an even keel that she was no longer thinking about, or at the very least was paying little attention to how her face looked, and for that reason she was all the more willing to sit in the coach when the apothecary arrived to invite us to be his guest and, at the same time, to take us along, especially when he said it was as necessary as it was advantageous for the purpose of breaking up the coagulated blood that she be driven a little in a carriage on the paved streets of the town and thus to some extent be shocked and shaken up. She adorned herself carelessly, in keeping with the constitution of her then distraught mind; I, however, put on my Sunday best in order to show the doctor what a distinguished fellow he'd have to deal with if he perchance in the future permitted my wife to goad him to put horns on my head. And so we drove to the apothecary shop and got out in the courtyard outside the garden where, in the merry summerhouse, the meal was to be held.

Now while the young doctor (about whose presence, and that he would be dining with us, my wife did not know the slightest thing) was inspecting the apothecary shop, which inspections had been arranged only *pro forma*, I strolled about in the garden with my heart's darling and showed her the rarities and the wondrous plants which were growing there. I honored her indeed as if she were a goddess and caressed her as if I only now had begun to wish to spoon with her, and thereby got her into such a good mood that it seemed as if she had indeed forgotten the past night or as if during it nothing untoward had befallen her.

Now when the table had been set, the wine placed in cold water, and not only the tablecloth but also the floor of the garden house strewn, to increase our pleasure, with all manner of flowers both beautiful and fragrant, and sprayed and moistened all over with rose water, and they also already began to bring in the food, look you, there came the doctor walking in with the apothecary too, at which my wife, in both her visage and her gestures, so changed and paled that I could easily deduce from it how violently her raging anger roared within her. I, however, immediately ran to meet His Excellency and made a pack of French compliments, namely in what measure I rejoiced at the unexpected good fortune which so unexpectedly afforded me the honor of making his acquaintance, and I compelled my wife, both by urging her in a friendly way and otherwise imploring her urgently, to go over (in fact, however, she went like a snake or adder charmed to do so) to welcome His Excellency by giving him her hand, although I believe that she would have rather spat in his face. The apothecary, however, made haste to urge us to be seated, and thus brought my wife to the table where the doctor was before she was able to realize that she would be sitting as if on pins and needles.

For straightway thereafter she began to make terrible faces, she looked like one of hell's furies, and her eyes blazed as if she wished to spit fire from them; she wiggled her arse back and forth as if she had wasps in it, she twirled her plate around back and forth the way Harlequin does his hat; and also the knives, forks, and spoons never seemed to be where she was satisfied with them; the corners of her mouth turned down like a bloodhound's; and not a word came out of it, and neither food nor drink went in. At first she appeared to be a deaf mute, and at the end like a carved statue. All of us—I, the apothecary, and the doctor—spoke to her and admonished her to eat, drink, and be merry, but to no avail, and therefore I took the occasion to make excuses for her to the doctor, saying: "Most highly esteemed doctor, be forbearing with her! Yesterday, in my absence, she tried to climb on to a beam and hang some white linen up in the upper story of our house, and when the ladder slipped out from under her, she fell down the stairs, which you can still well see from her face, so that today there will be little joy in her; and what worries me most is that I fear she might perchance have crushed something in her body which it will take her some time to get over. If, therefore you, doctor, were perchance to know of a sure remedy by which might be prevented the future danger which may arise from this, I request most humbly that you communicate it to me for your regular fee. Thereupon the doctor mentioned various medicaments, such as were useful to dissolve clotted blood, and told her in detail how she should use the one and the other; she, however, for her part did not deign to even look at him, but rather was thinking what the goldsmith's boy thought [i.e. kiss my arse], for which reason the doctor without doubt must needs have held her in his thoughts to be a crude and impolite woman, or even a fool.

Now after we had sat there this way for nigh onto an hour, the apothecary bade his servants, also the doctor's famula and my

housekeeper, who was attending to her mistress, to go to eat too. I, however, did not wish to permit the housekeeper to go away at this time, but rather commanded her to stay with her mistress. They were scarcely gone, however, when the apothecary's boy came running back and cried: "You are to come, master; there is a city councilor here who wishes to speak to you about something right away." Thereupon the apothecary left, but the boy straightway came back again and said: "Not my master, but this gentleman here (pointing to me) is asked to come outside." Therefore I stood up and growled that I was not to have even enough time to eat a piece of bread in peace with honorable folk. I did not go far away, however, but rather stood with the apothecary behind some latticework where I was able to see and hear everything that my wife would now finally do with her beloved doctor.

She, at that point, was completely consumed with and possessed by rage; she had naught in her mouth but bitter gall, naught in her eyes but poisonous looks, naught in her heart but furious ire, and naught in her cheeks but fire and flames, and her face looked just as if the spirits of hell had taken up lodging there. The doctor, who had heretofore not had the slightest acquaintanceship with her, attempted, after I was gone, to speak with her in a friendly way, but barely had he opened his mouth when she interrupted him and said: "O you most ungrateful beast! You nasty, filthy pig! How dare you have the nerve to say even one word to me! You vile scoundrel and devil's cloaca, can it be possible that you are such a shit-gut that you are not ashamed of the scurvy trick you played on me? How can it ever be that a nasty shithouse like you does not hesitate to bring your stinking slutty carcass and repository of all filth into my presence? You miserable pig! I swear to you that if I did not wish to spare this place, and did not have other things to worry about, I should twist this knife in your body; but keep in mind that you never let me lay

eyes on you again all the days of my life, and see to it that you get your stinking hoopoe nest out of here immediately!" Here my wife did not spare my housekeeper's ears at all, because she knew about her alleged secret; and the doctor was so taken aback by this that he sat there like a bump on a log and did not move a muscle. But so that he should not have time, either, to recover, I came back in with the apothecary and looked at my wife, who was still trembling with rage. I pretended that I was horrified with wonderment at the sight of her and said: "O, my treasure, how you do look! Sweetheart, what has befallen you? O, my darling sweetheart, if perchance sitting in one place for a long time hasn't set well with you, then get up a little and walk a bit in the garden." She answered: "I must confess, I don't exactly feel like a parson on Easter Sunday." And since she therefore thought that I believed that she was ailing, look you, she forthwith became very sick, with the request that the apothecary should have her together with her maid driven home without delay, which was just the thing which I at that moment wished, sought, and found.

Scarcely had she gone when the doctor complained to me about how uncivilly and irresponsibly she had attacked and cursed him in the vilest language in the world. Now I was there again obliged to adapt myself nicely to the prank. "Alas!" I said, "now I know why she sat there so quietly the entire meal. She is unfortunately again in the state with which she has been burdened the last few years. Alas, wretched man that I am, what happiness have I to hope from her despite all her goods and gold? Most esteemed doctor, I pray you be so kind as to not only take that into account where she is concerned, but also to have Christian pity upon me, poor man that I am. There befalls her on occasions a melancholy condition in which at times she begins to rage to such an extent that in these fits of fury no one is safe in her presence; she utters the most terrible curses and insults to the most innocent folk and makes no distinctions at all between

all those whom she then espies, and myself she mostly spares least of all. And what is worst of all is that she at times does not even hesitate to address the closest person to her and to belabor him with fists and fingernails before he knows what is happening and can protect himself. And if she attacks no one of the sort, then she vents her fury upon herself, as I now must really believe that she did not fall down the stairs, as she and my servants persuaded me, but rather that she did harm to herself, as you probably saw without difficulty from the look of her face.

The best thing is really that she soon comes to her senses again, else I should have had her put away long since; then she cannot find enough words to beg forgiveness of those whom she finds out she has offended. I also know that soon she will fall to her knees to achieve it of you, doctor; but if one were to exchange many words with her now, he would only make bad matters worse, and the more one talked, the more angry in her rage she would become.”

The doctor hereupon showed himself quite sympathetic to my wife’s great affliction and said, he not only would not hold against her how she had vilified him, but would also pray to God in the bargain that He might take from me and her such heavy heartfelt sorrow. And after I had hereupon pretended to be quite sorrowful, we took leave of one each other all the sooner. I, however, was joyous at heart that this plot which I had in mind had so excellently succeeded, for which reason there was enough to laugh about for me and the apothecary, who observed better than I with what sullen looks my wife graced her ring on the doctor’s hand.

