

Chapter Nine

One whoreson deceives the other, and the innocent party gets the short end of the stick

No one can believe what particular cleverness and excellence I ascribed to myself when I saw that I had played this farce so well and had made my wife despise the doctor and the doctor my wife, and had made both of them wary of and incompetent for a future war of Venus with one another, and insured myself to such an extent from wearing horns in cuckoldry. But fool that I was, I did not see what I should more rightly have seen and more assiduously observed, namely that in so doing I myself had become an adulterer, a deceiver and calumniator, *in summa* a fellow of the sort who, without God's grace, without penance and penitence, and without benefit of the unfathomable mercifulness of God, would never partake of His kingdom. Rather I rejoiced that my lost money had been exchanged for the invisibility by which I had so nicely thwarted my wife's plans and escaped cuckoldry; and at that time even if someone had offered to give me a whole ton of gold for my handkerchief, in which this power lay, he would nevertheless not have got it from me, so taken with it was I, even if both my temporal and eternal well-being were to be shattered because of it.

In this state of enchantment and defeat of my sound reason and my seventeen senses, I was interested in nothing more than that I, whenever I carried my handkerchief with me, must needs always be invisible, and that I was not able to be seen when I wished, unless I put it from me. I pondered back and forth on the matter and thought to myself: perhaps it too has a property like Gyges' ring, with which he, Gyges, according to how he turned it, was able to make himself

invisible or let himself be seen when he so wished. Now what I imagined about it was indeed the case, although for a long time I was not able to determine it, even though I undertook all manner of tests with it, till at last I got to the bottom of it by accident. Meanwhile I always kept my handkerchief in my little garden house for safekeeping, because I had not the heart to carry it, invisibly, with me into my house; for I feared that if I were to carry it home and no one were to see me going about in the house, but afterwards I nevertheless let myself be seen, then my wife and servants would bode me no good. Therefore when I wished to be invisible I was obliged first to go into my garden, and when I wished to let myself be seen again, put off my invisibility there once more, which seemed to me to be a great inconvenience, of which I should have liked to be rid.

Interim my mistress housekeeper confided to me, even though not more than twelve days had yet past since I had eaten as a guest with my wife at the apothecary's, that she had determined that in three-quarters of a year the sort of sweets we had enjoyed that day would be revealed with hands and feet and begged me with tears in her eyes to stand by her with legal advice so that neither she nor I should come to shame. I answered her that we had acted with Freddie in mind; if she wished to have him as the father, then the matter would soon be arranged, and in fact I knew of no other advice for either her or me. And so I quite easily talked her into acquiescing to my proposal and letting the afore-mentioned Freddie, following his ardent lusts, run into the snare, and the sooner we set the trap for this purpose, the better; but she was highly troubled by the fear that he might perchance notice that the barriers had already been lifted for him, but she let herself be consoled by the skillfulness of the apothecary, who, at my request, so equipped her for combat that when she was to go into the fray and do battle with Freddie, the good ninny was not able to detect a trace of any warrior who had already

fought the good fight, even if he should have had the sense of smell of an eagle.

Freddie was going about at that time and showing all the signs of a man in love, so that the housekeeper was quite easily able, with only a nod, to steer him and take him where she wished. To put it briefly, she appointed a night in which she promised to pair herself with him, and she did not keep it secret from me either, so that the two of them should have honorable folk present at the marriage too.

Now when that night came, I drank till I was half drunk, so that Freddie would proceed all the more boldly when he thought that I was now lying up to my ears in wine; but that did not cause me to sleep through the night time, but rather when midnight was at hand, I behaved in bed as if I were quite ill, almost as much so as the doctor, or rather I in his name, had done, and in so doing awakened my wife from her sleep, to whom I complained that the call of nature was compelling me to go to the jakes. Now, because a muttering then arose amongst the servants, perchance because for a short time now they had been remarking a ghost in the house (I know not whether they had heard me when I was tramping about invisibly, or Freddie when he was sneaking along after his lady-love), I bade my wife go with me so that I might not be afraid; she was quite willing to do so, for she perchance feared that otherwise I might go in the bed; she lit her wax taper with the night-light, and we both put about us our sheepskins, which people are wont to put on when they are either sick or at least do not intend to remain out of bed for long; and so we wandered with one another toward the privy through a long hall in which we were obliged to go past Freddie's bed chamber. There we found the door standing wide open and his bed still made up and not turned down. "Odds fuckament!" said I. "Now look you, wife, what manner of ghost is going about in our house! That's a fine way to behave! I estimate that if we look at the matter closely we shall find

that either we have suffered losses from the pantry through theft, or one of our maids will wax like the moon. I'll know for once and for all where Freddie is this night." Thereupon I took my master key and opened with it the other two clerks' bedchambers; them I found in the places where they belonged; afterwards I had my wife go in the two maids' chambers, where she likewise found everything in order. Therefore all that was left was the chamber of her cousin, the housekeeper, a room the state of which I forthwith wished to see, at which my wife was heartily affrighted, without doubt because she knew of Freddie's love for her housekeeper-cousin, since to her herself she had complained about his importunity, but because of her own affairs and the amatory confusion which beset her at that time had received naught else save aid and consolation from her, which was such as to incite her, the housekeeper, herself rather than to thwart Freddie in his pursuit of her. Therefore she hesitated to open up the chamber and sought to find a way out by saying: "I shall never ever believe that my cousin would be so frivolous and would be remiss in anything which would be disadvantageous to her honor and to our sustenance." I, however, answered: "Cousin or no cousin! 'Tis always the one you trust the most who rides off with your horse. If she is our cousin, then we are all the more strictly bound to keep watch over her honor in our house." During this quarreling, which on each side stemmed from a heart convinced of its bad conscience, and by which each sought to deceive the other and to preserve, at the same time, his own and the housekeeper's honor, we drew near the chamber and found, after opening the door, the two lovers lying with one another in bed, and indeed, as can be easily imagined, not in such posture as if they had wished to pose for the double-eagle, but rather clasped in each other's arms and asleep. "Aha, wife!" said I. "Do you see now whom I trust?" She was affrighted, to be sure, but dared not grumble in the least at her because it was known to her that she herself was

guilty of a greater misdeed; rather, she bade me to do what I of my own accord was more inclined to do than was she, namely to pardon my housekeeper, and for just that reason she got her wish all the more easily, too.

On the other hand, however, my good substitute, poor Freddie, was obliged to suffer all the harsher berating, and it could easily have gone so far that my wife would have dragged him out of bed by the hair; I, however, did not wish to allow it, but rather was content to listen to what a long litany of fine titles she read him. But since the housekeeper was weeping prettily, he trotted out the most heart-rending words to beg my wife's and my pardon. "'Tis unnecessary to relate all the *formalia*, much less what manner of sermon we preached him; 'tis enough to know the end of the song, the gist of which was that early the next morning he should go to the parson, have the *sponsalia* arranged, and straightway thereafter lead our little cousin to the altar in public ceremony, at which my wife as well as Freddie and the housekeeper were satisfied, but I best of all, despite the fact that I pretended the contrary and swore to high heaven, if I were not sparing the housekeeper because she was so closely related to my wife, then I should not leave her with her honor intact, but should rather chase both of them out of the house with scorn and shame.

Hereupon I went back to bed together with my wife, who thanked me most profusely for having behaved so decently on her account to her cousin and having settled the matter so nicely that she might still appear in the eyes of the world a person of honor; she extolled my excellent mind and said to my undying praise:

He is smart and worldly wise
Who does well at all he tries.

But should she have known herself to be guiltless and known the true nature of this transaction in all its details, what manner of *laudes* would she have probably read me then!