

IV – *The Spice of Love*

Do you know, Marquis, that you will end by putting me in a temper? Heavens, how very stupid you are sometimes! I see it in your letter; you have not understood me at all. Take heed; I did not say that you should take for a mistress a despicable object. That is not at all my idea. But I said that in reality you needed only a love affair, and that, to make it pleasant, you should not attach yourself exclusively to substantial qualities. I repeat it – when in love, men need only to be amused, and I believe on this subject I am an authority. Traces of temper and caprice, a senseless quarrel, all this has more effect upon women, and retains their affection more than all the reason imaginable, more than steadiness of character.

Someone whom you esteem for the justice and strength of his ideas, said one day at my house, that caprice in women was too closely allied to beauty to be an antidote. I opposed this opinion with so much animation, that it could readily be seen that the contrary maxim was my sentiment, and I am, in truth, well persuaded that caprice is not close to beauty, except to animate its charms in order to make them more attractive, to serve as a goad, and to flavor them. There is no colder sentiment, and none that endures less than admiration. One easily becomes accustomed to see the same features, however regular they may be, and when a little malignity does not give them life or action, their very regularity soon destroys the sentiment they excite. A cloud of temper, even, can give to a beautiful countenance the necessary variety, to prevent the weariness of seeing it always in the same state. In a word, woe to the woman of too monotonous a temperament; her monotony satiates and disgusts. She is always the same statue; with her a man is always right. She is so good, so gentle, that she takes away from people

the privilege of quarreling with her, and this is often such a great pleasure! Put in her place a vivacious woman, capricious, decided, to a certain limit, however, and things assume a different aspect. The lover will find in the same person the pleasure of variety. Temper is the salt, the quality that prevents it from becoming stale. Restlessness, jealousy, quarrels, making friends again, spitefulness, all are the food of love. Enchanting variety! which fills, which occupies a sensitive heart much more deliciously than the regularity of behavior, and the tiresome monotony which is called “good disposition.”

I know how you men must be governed. A caprice puts you in an uncertainty, which you have as much trouble and grief in dispelling as though it were a victory obtained over a new object. Roughness makes you hold your breath. You do not stop disputing, but neither do you cease to conquer and to be conquered. In vain does reason sigh. You cannot comprehend how such an imp manages to subjugate you so tyrannically. Everything tells you that the idol of your heart is a collection of caprices and follies, but she is a spoiled child, whom you cannot help but love. The efforts which reflection causes you to make to loosen them, serve only to forge still tighter your chains, for love is never so strong as when you believe it ready to break away in the heat of a quarrel. It loves, it storms; with it, everything is convulsive. Would you reduce it to rule? It languishes; it expires. In a word, this is what I wanted to say: do not take for a mistress a woman who has only reliable qualities, but one who is sometimes dominated by temper, and silences reason; otherwise I shall say that it is not a love affair you want, but to set up housekeeping.