

L – Some Women Are Very Cunning

You may derive as much amusement out of it as you wish, Marquis, but I shall continue to tell you that you are not fascinated by Madame la Presidente. Believe me, when I say that I see more clearly into your affairs than you do yourself. I have known a hundred good men who, like you, pretended with the best faith in the world that they were amorous, but who, in truth were not in any manner whatsoever.

There are maladies of the heart as well as maladies of the body; some are real and some are imaginary. Not everything that attracts you toward a woman is love. The habit of being together, the convenience of seeing each other, to get away from one's self, the necessity for a little gallantry, the desire to please – in a word, a thousand other reasons which do not resemble a passion in the least. These are what you generally take to be love, and the women are the first to fortify this error. Always flattered by the homage rendered them, provided their vanity profits by it, they rarely inquire into the motives to which they owe it. But, after all, are they not right? They would nearly always lose by it.

To all the motives of which I have just spoken, you can add still another, quite as capable of creating an illusion in the nature of your sentiments. Madame la Presidente is, without contradiction, the most beautiful woman of our time; she is newly married; she refused the homage of the most amiable man of our acquaintance. Perhaps nothing could be more flattering to your vanity than to make a conquest that would not fail to give you the kind of celebrity to which you aspire. That, my dear Marquis, is what you call love, and it will be difficult for you to disabuse yourself of the impression, for by force of persuading yourself that it is love, you will, in a short time firmly believe that the inclination is real. It will be a very singular thing some day, to see with what dignity you will speak of your pretended sentiments; with what good faith you will believe that they deserve recognition; and, what will be still more

agreeable, will be the deference you will believe should be their due. But unfortunately, the result will undeceive you, and you will then be the first to laugh at the importance with which you treated so silly an affair.

Shall I tell you how far injustice reaches? I am fully persuaded that you will not become more amorous. Henceforth, you will have nothing but a passing taste, frivolous relations, engagements, caprices; all the arrows of love will glance from you. It is true you will not experience its pangs, but will you enjoy, in the least, its sweetness? Can you hope ever to recover from the fantasies to which you surrender yourself, those moments of delight, which were formerly your supreme felicity? I have no desire to flatter you, but I believe it my duty to do you this much justice: Your heart is intended for refined pleasures. It is not I who hold you responsible for the dissipation in which you are plunged; it is the young fools around you. They call enjoyment the abuse they make of pleasure; their example carries you away. But this intoxication will be dissipated sooner or later, and you will soon see, at least I hope so, that you have been deceived in two ways in the state of your heart: you thought it was fascinated by Madame la Presidente, you will recognize your mistake; you thought she had ceased to have an inclination for ---, but I hold to the words I have uttered. Perhaps there will come a time when I shall be at liberty to express my thoughts more freely. Now, I reply to the remainder of your letter.

Confess it, Marquis, that you had little else to do this morning when you re-read my letters. I add that you must have been in a bad humor to undertake their criticism. Some brilliant engagement, some flattering rendezvous was wanting. But I do not care to elude the difficulty. So I seem to contradict myself sometimes? If I were to admit that it might very well be, if I were to give you the same answer that Monsieur de la Bruyère gave his critics the other

day, "It is not I who contradict myself, it is the heart upon which I reason," could you reasonably conclude from it that everything I have said to you is false? I do not believe it.

But how do I know, in effect, if led away by the various situations in which you were placed, I may not have appeared to destroy what I had advanced on different occasions? How do I know, if seeing you ready to yield to a whim, I may not have carried too far, truths, which, feebly uttered, would not, perhaps, have brought you back? How do I know, in a word, if being interested in the happiness of a friend, the desire to serve her may not have sometimes diminished my sincerity? I think I am very good natured to reply seriously to the worries you

have caused me. Ought I not first to take cognizance of the fact that there is more malice in your letter than criticism? This will be the last time you will have an opportunity to abuse my simplicity. I am going to console myself for your perfidy with some one who is assuredly not so wicked as you.

What a pity it is that you are not a woman! It would give me so much pleasure to discuss the new coiffures with you! I never saw anything so extravagant as their height. At least, Marquis, remember that if Madame la Presidente does not wear one of them incessantly, you can no longer remain attached to her with decency.