

*LI – The Parts Men and Women Play*

So the affair has been decided! Whatever I may say of it, you are the master of Madame la Presidente – a beloved rival has been sacrificed for you and you triumph.

How prompt your vanity is to make profit out of everything. I would laugh heartily if your pretended triumph should end by your receiving notice to quit some fine morning. For it may well be that this sacrifice, of which you boast so much, is nothing but a stratagem.

Ever since you have been associated with women, have you not established as a principle that you must be on your guard against the sentiments they effect? If your beauty had accepted you merely for the purpose of reawakening a languishing love in the heart of her Celadon, if you were only the instrument of jealousy on the part of one and artifice on the other, would that be a miracle?

You say that Madame la Presidente is not very shrewd, and consequently incapable of such a ruse. My dear Marquis, love is a great tutor, and the most stupid women (in other respects) have often an acute discernment, more accurate and more certain than any other, when it comes to an affair of the heart. But let us leave this particular thesis, and examine men in general who are in the same situation as you.

They all believe as you do, that the sacrifice of a rival supposes some superiority over him. But how often does it happen that this same sacrifice is only a by play? If it is sincere, the woman either loved the rival or she did not. If she loved him, then as soon as she leaves him, it is a sure proof that she loves him no longer, in

which case what glory is there for you in such a preference? If she did not love him, what can you infer to your advantage from a pretended victory over a man who was indifferent to her?

There is also another case where you may be preferred, without that preference being any more flattering. It is when the vanity of the woman you attack is stronger than her inclination for the disgraced lover. Your rank, your figure, your reputation, your fortune, may determine her in your favor. It is very rare (I say it to the shame of women, and men are no less ridiculous in that respect), it is rare, I repeat, that a lover, who has nothing but noble sentiments to offer, can long hold his own against a man distinguished for his rank, or his position, who has servants, a livery, an equipage, etc. When the most tender lover makes a woman blush for his appearance, when she dare not acknowledge him as her conqueror, when she does not even consider him as an object she can sacrifice with éclat, I predict that his reign will be short. Her reasons for getting rid of him will be to her an embarrassment of choice. Thus the defunct of la Presidente was a counselor of state, without doubt as dull and as stiff as his wig. What a figure to set up against a courtier, against a warrior like you?

Well, will you believe in my predictions another time? What did I tell you? Did the Chevalier find it difficult to persuade your Penelope? This desolate woman, ready to break her heart, gave you a successor in less than fifteen days, loves him, proves it, and is flouted. Is this losing too much time? What is your opinion?