

VII – Women Expect a Quid Pro Quo From Men

Oh, who doubts, Marquis, that it may be only by essential qualities that you can succeed in pleasing women? It is simply a question of knowing what meaning you attach to this expression. Do you call essential qualities, worth, firmness of character, precision of judgment, extent of learning, prudence, and discretion? How can I tell the number of virtues that often embarrass you more than they make you happy? Our minds are not in accord upon this matter. Reserve all the qualities I have specified for the intercourse you are obliged to have with men; they are quite proper under such circumstances. But when it comes to gallantry, you will have to change all such virtues for an equal number of charming traits, those that captivate; it is the only coin that passes current in this country; it is the only merit, and you must be on your guard against calling it spurious money. It may be that true merit consists less in real perfection, than in that which the world requires. It is far more advantageous to possess the qualities agreeable to those whom we desire to please, than to have those we believe to be estimable. In a word, we must imitate the morals and even the caprices of those with whom we associate, if we expect to live in peace with them.

What is the destiny of women? What is their rôle on Earth? It is to please. Now, a charming figure, personal graces, in a word, all the amiable and brilliant qualities are the only means of succeeding in that rôle. Women possess them to a superlative degree, and it is in these qualities that they wish men to resemble them. It will be vain for you to accuse them of frivolity, for they are playing the beauty rôle, since they are destined to make you happy. Is it not, indeed, due to the charm of our companionship, to the gentleness of our manners, that you owe your most satisfying pleasures, your social virtues, in fact, your whole happiness? Have some good faith in this matter. Is it possible for the sciences of themselves, the love of glory, valor, and nay, even that friendship, of

which you boast so much, to make you perfectly happy? The pleasure you draw from any of them, can it be keen enough to make you feel happy? Certainly not. None of them have the power to relieve you from a wearisome monotony, which crushes you and makes you an object of pity.

It is women who have taken upon themselves to dissipate these mortal languors by the vivacious gaiety they inject into their society, by the charms they know so well how to lavish where they will prove effectual. A reckless joy, an agreeable delirium, a delicious intoxication, are alone capable of awakening your attention, and making you understand that you are really happy; for, Marquis, there is a vast difference between merely enjoying happiness and relishing the sensation of enjoying it. The possession of necessary things does not make a man comfortable; it is the superfluous which makes him rich, and which makes him feel that he is rich.

It is not because you possess superior qualities that you are a pleasant companion; it may be a real defect, which is essential to you. To be received with open arms, you must be agreeable, amusing, and necessary to the pleasure of others. I warn you that you cannot succeed in any other manner, particularly with women. Tell me, what would you have me do with your learning, the geometry of your mind, with the precision of your memory, etc.? If you have only such advantages, Marquis, if you have no charming accomplishments to offset your crudity – I can vouch for their opinion – far from pleasing women, you will seem to them like a critic of whom they will be afraid, and you will place them under so much constraint, that the enjoyment they might have permitted themselves in your society will be banished. Why, indeed, try to be amiable toward a man who is a source of anxiety to you by his nonchalance, who does not un-bosom himself? Women are not at their ease except with those who take chances with them, and enter into their

spirit. In a word, too much circumspection gives others a chill like that felt by a man who goes out of a warm room into a cold wind. I intended to say that habitual reserve locks the doors of the hearts of those who associate with us; they have no room to expand.

You must also bear this in mind, Marquis, that in cases of gallantry, your first advances must be made under the most favorable circumstances. You must have read somewhere that one pleases more by agreeable faults than by essential qualities. Great virtues are like pieces of gold of which one makes less use than of ordinary currency.

This idea calls to my mind those people who, in place of our kind of money, use shells as their medium of exchange. Well, do you imagine that these people are not so rich as we with all the treasures of the new world? We might, at first blush, take this sort of wealth as actual poverty, but we should be quickly undeceived upon reflection, for metals have no value except in opinion. Our gold would be false money to those people. Now, the qualities you call essential are not worth any more in cases of gallantry,

where only pebbles are sufficient. What matters the conventional mark, provided there is commerce?

Now, this is my conclusion: If it be true, as you cannot doubt, that you ought not to expect happiness except from an interchange of agreeable qualities in women, you may be sure that you will never please them unless you possess advantages similar to theirs. I stick to the point. You men are constantly boasting about your science, your firmness, etc., but tell me, how weary would you not be, how disgusted even, with life, if, always logical, you were condemned to be forever learned and sordid, to live only in the company of philosophers? I know you, you would soon become weary of admiration for your good qualities, and the way you are made, you would rather do without virtue than pleasure. Do not amuse yourself, then, by holding yourself out as a man with great qualities in the sense you consider them. True merit is that which is esteemed by those we aim to please. Gallantry has its own laws, and Marquis, amiable men are the sages of this world.