

XL – Oratory and Fine Phrases do Not Breed Love

The example of the Marquise has not yet had any effect on the heart of her friend. It appears, on the contrary, that she is more on guard against you, and that you have drawn upon yourself her reproaches through some slight favor you have deprived her of.

I have been thinking that she would not fail on this occasion to recall to your recollection, the protestations of respect and disinterestedness you made when you declared your passion for her. It is customary in similar cases. But what seems strange about it is, that the same eagerness that a woman accepts as a proof of disrespect, before she is in perfect accord with her lover, becomes, in her imagination, a proof of love and esteem, as soon as they meet on a common ground.

Listen to married women, and to all those who, being unmarried, permit the same prerogatives; hear them, I say, in their secret complaints against unfaithful husbands and cooling lovers. They are despised, and that is the sole reason they can imagine. But with us, what they consider a mark of esteem and sincerity, is it anything else than the contrary? I told you some time ago, that women themselves, when they are acting in good faith, go farther than men in making love consist in an effervescence of the blood. Study a lover at the commencement of her passion – with her, then, love is purely a metaphysical sentiment, with which the senses have not the least relation. Similar to those philosophers who, in the midst of grievous

torments would not confess that they were suffering pain, she is a martyr to her own system; but, at last, while combating this chimera, the poor thing becomes affected by a change. Her lover vainly repeats that love is a divine, metaphysical sentiment, that it lives on fine phrases, on spiritual discourses, that it would be degrading to mingle with it anything material and human; he vainly boasts of his respect and refinement. I tell you, Marquis, on the part of all women, that such an orator will never make his fortune. His respect will be taken as an insult, his refinement for derision, and his fine discourses for ridiculous pretexts. All the grace that will be accorded him, is that she will find a pretext to quarrel with him because he has been less refined with some other woman, and that he will be put to the sorrowful necessity of displaying his high flown sentiments to his titular mistress, and what is admirable about this is, that the excuse for it arises out of the same principle.

P.S. – You have so much deference for my demands! You not only show my letters to M. de la Rochefoucauld, but you read them before the whole assembly of my friends. It is true that the indulgence with which my friends judge them, consoles me somewhat for your indiscretion, and I see very well that the best thing for me to do is to continue on in my own way as I have in the past. But, at least, be discreet when I mention matters relating to the glory of the Countess; otherwise, no letters.