

*XLI – Discretion Is Sometimes the Better Part of Valor*

No, Marquis, I, cannot pardon in you the species of fury with which you desire what you are pleased to call the “supreme happiness.” How blind you are, not to know that when you are sure of a woman’s heart, it is in your interests to enjoy her defeat a long time before it becomes entire. Will you never understand, that of all there is good on Earth, it is the sweetness of love that must be used with the greatest economy?

If I were a man, and were so fortunate as to have captured the heart of a woman like the Countess, with what discretion I would use my advantages? How many gradations there would be in the law I should impose upon myself, to overlook them successively, and even leisurely? Of how many amiable pleasures, unknown to men, would not I be the creator? Like a miser, I would contemplate my treasure unceasingly, learn its precious value, feel that in it consisted all my felicity, base all my happiness upon the possession of it, reflect that it is all mine, that I may dispose of it, and yet maintain my resolution not to deprive myself of its use.

What a satisfaction to read in the eyes of an adorable woman the power you have over her; to see her slightest acts give birth to an impression of tenderness, whenever they relate to you; to hear her voice soften when it is to you or of you she speaks; to enjoy her confusion at your slightest eagerness, her anxiety at your most innocent caresses? Is there a more delicious condition than that of a lover who is sure of being loved, and can there be any sweeter than at such moments? What a charm for a lover to be expected with an impatience that is not concealed, to be received with an eagerness all the more flattering from the effort made to hide the half of it?

She dresses in a fashion to please; she assumes the deportment, the style, and the pose that may flatter her lover the most. In former

times women dressed to please in general, now their entire toilette is to please men; for his sake she wears bangles, jewelry, ribbons, bracelets, rings. He is the object of it all, the woman is transformed into the man; it is he she loves in her own person. Can you find anything in love more enchanting than the resistance of a woman who implores you not to take advantage of her weakness? Is there anything, in a word, more seductive than a voice almost stifled with emotion, than a refusal for which she reproaches herself, and, the rigor of which she attempts to soften by tender looks, before a complaint is made? I cannot conceive any.

But it is certain that as soon as she yields to your eagerness, all these pleasures weaken in proportion to the facility met. You alone may prolong them, even increase them, by taking the time to know all the sweetness and its taste. However, you are not satisfied unless the possession be entire, easy, and continuous. And after that, you are surprised to find indifference, coolness, and inconstancy in your heart. Have you not done everything to satiate your passion for the beloved object? I have always contended that love never dies from desire, but often from indigestion, and I will sometime tell you in confidence my feelings for Count. You will understand from that, how to manage a passion to render happiness enduring; you will see whether I know the human heart and true felicity; you will learn from my example that the economy of the sentiments is, in the question of love, the only reasonable metaphysics. In fine, you will know how little you understand your true interests in your conduct toward the Countess. To interfere with your projects, I shall be with her as often as it is possible. Now, do not be formal, and tell me that I am an advocate on both sides, for I am persuaded that I am acting for the good of the parties interested.