

XLIII – Women Demand Respect

I should never have expected it, Marquis. What! My zeal in your behalf has drawn your reproaches down upon me? I share with the Countess the bad humor her severity has caused you. Do you know? If what you say were well founded, nothing could be more piquant for me than the ironical tone in which you laud my principles. But to render me responsible for your success, as you attempt, have you dared think for an instant, that my object in writing you, was ever for the purpose of giving you lessons in seduction? Do you not perceive any difference in teaching you to please, and exciting you toward seduction? I have told you the motives that incline women to love, it is true, but have I ever said that they were easier to vanquish? Have I ever told you to attack them by sensuality, and that in attacking them to suppose them without delicacy? I do not believe it.

When your inexperience and your timidity might cause you to play the rôle of a ridiculous personage among women, I explained the harm these defects might cause you in the world. I advised you to have more confidence, in order to lead you insensibly in the direction of that noble and respectful boldness you should have when with women. But as soon as I saw that your pretensions were going too far, and that they might wound the reputation of the Countess, I did not dissimulate, I took sides against you, and nothing was more reasonable – I had become her friend. You see, then, how unjust you are in my regard, and you are no less so in regard to her. You treat her as if she were an equivocal character. According to your idea, she has neither decided for nor against galantry, and what you clearly see in her conduct is, that she is a more logical coquette than other women. What an opinion!

But there is much to pardon in your situation. However, a man without prejudice, would see in the Countess only a lover as reasonable as she is tender, a woman who, without having an ostentatious virtue, nevertheless remains con-

stantly attached to it, a woman, in a word, who seeks in good faith the proper means of reconciling love and duty. The difficulty in allying these two contraries is not slight, and it is the source of the inequalities that wound you. Figure to yourself the combats she must sustain, the revolutions she suffers, her embarrassment in endeavoring to preserve a lover whom too uniform a resistance might repel. If she were sure of keeping you by resisting your advances, but you carry your odd conduct to the extent of leaving her when her resistance is too prolonged. While praising our virtue, you abandon us, and then, what shame for us! But since in both cases it is not certain that her lover will be held, it is preferable to accept the inconvenient, rather than cause you to lose her heart and her esteem.

That is our advice, for the Countess and I think precisely alike on the subject. Be more equitable, Marquis; complain of her rather than criticize her. If her character were more decided, perhaps you would be better satisfied with her, but even in that case would you be satisfied very long? I doubt it.

Adieu. We count on seeing you this evening at Madame de La Fayette's, and that you will prove more reasonable. The Abbé Gedoyne will be presented me. The assembly will be brilliant, but you will doubtless be bored, for you will not see the only object that can attract you, and you will say of my apartment, what Malherbe so well says of the garden of the Louvre:

“Mais quoi que vous ayez, vous n'avez point
Caliste,
Et moi je ne vois rien, quand je ne la vois
pas.”

(“Whatever you may have, Caliste you have
not got,
And I, I can see nothing when I see her
not.”)