

*XLV – What Favors Men Consider Faults*

To explain in two words to your satisfaction, Marquis, this is what I think of the letter I sent you yesterday: For a woman to profit by the advice of Monsieur de Saint-Evremond, it is requisite that she should be affected with only a mediocre fancy, and have excited the passion of love. However, we shall talk about that more at large whenever it may please you. Now, I will take up what concerns you.

The sacrifice the Countess has exacted of you is well worth the price you put upon it. To renounce for her sake, a woman whose exterior proclaimed her readiness to accord you whatever favor you might be willing to ask; to renounce her publicly, in the presence of her rival, and with so little regard for her vanity, is an effort which naturally will not pass without a proportionate recompense. The Countess could not have found a happier pretext for giving you her portrait.

But to take a solemn day, when the Marquise received at her home for the first time since her illness; to select a moment when the moneyed woman was taking up arms to make an assault of beauty upon a woman of rank; to speak to her merely in passing, to pretend to surrender yourself entirely to the pleasure of seeing her rival; to entertain the latter and become one of her party, is an outrage for which you will never be pardoned. Revenge will come quickly, and be as cruel as possible. You will see. It is I who guarantee it. Now for the second paragraph of your letter:

You ask me whether the last favor, or rather the last fault we can commit, is a certain proof that a woman loves you. Yes and no.

Yes, if you love the woman for whom you had your first passion, and she is refined and virtuous. But even in such a case, this proof will not be any more certain, or more flattering for you, than all the others – she may have given you of her inclination. Whatever a woman may do when she loves, even things of the slightest essential nature in appearance, are as much

certain marks of her passion, as those greater things of which men are so proud. I will even add, that if this virtuous woman is of a certain disposition, the last favor will prove less than a thousand other small sacrifices you count for nothing; for then, on her own behalf, less than on yours, she is too much interested in listening to you, for you to claim the glory of having persuaded her, although every one else would have been accorded the same favor.

I know a woman who permitted herself to be vanquished two or three times by men she did not love, and the man she really loved never obtained a single favor. It may happen, then, that the last favor proves nothing to him to whom it is granted. Whereas, on the contrary, it may happen that he owes the granting of it, to the little regard had for him. Women never respect themselves more, than with those they esteem, and you may be quite sure that it requires a very imperious inclination to cause a reasonable woman to forget herself in the presence of one whose disdain she dreads. Your pretended triumph, therefore, may originate in causes, which, so far from being glorious for you, would humiliate you, if you were aware of them.

We see, for example, a lover who may be repelled; the woman who loves him fears he will escape her to pay his addresses to another woman more accommodating; she does not wish to lose him, for it is always humiliating to be abandoned; she yields, because she is not aware of any other means of holding him. They say there is nothing to reproach in this. If he leaves her after that, at least he will be put in the wrong, for, since a woman becomes attached more by the favors she grants, she imagines the man will be forced into gratitude. What folly!

Women are actuated by different motives in yielding. Curiosity impels some; they desire to know what love is. Another woman, with few advantages of person or figure, would hold her lover by the attractions of pleasure. One woman

is determined to make a conquest flattering to her vanity. Still another one surrenders to pity, opportunity, importunities, to the pleasure of taking revenge on a rival, or an unfaithful lover. How can I enumerate them all? The heart is so very strange in its vagaries, and the reasons and cause, which actuate it, are so curious and varied, that it is impossible to discover all the hidden springs that set it in motion. But if we delude ourselves as to the means of holding you, how often do men deceive themselves as to the proofs of our love? If they possessed any delicacy of discernment, they would find a thou-

sand signs that prove more than the most signal favor granted.

Tell me, Marquis, what have I done to Monsieur de Coulanges? It is a month since he has set foot in my house. But I will not reproach him. I shall be very pleasant with him when he does come. He is one of the most amiable men I am acquainted with. I shall be very angry with you if you fail to bring him to me on my return from Versailles. I want him to sing me the last couplets he has composed; I am told they are charming.