

*XLVII – Cause of Quarrels Among Rivals*

What, I, Marquis, astonished at the new bickerings of your moneyed woman? Do not doubt for an instant that she employs all the refinements of coquetry to take you away from the Countess. She may have a liking for you, but moderate your amour propre so far as that is concerned, for the most powerful motive of her conduct, is, without contradiction, the desire for revenge. Her vanity is interested in punishing her rival for having obtained the preference.

Women never pardon such a thing as that, and if he who becomes the subject of the quarrel is not the first object of their anger, it is because they need him to display their resentment. You have encountered in the rival of the Countess precisely what you exacted from her to strengthen your attachment. You are offered in advance the price of the attentions you devote to her, and from which you will soon be dispensed – and I think you will have so little delicacy as to accept them. It is written across the heart of every man, “To the easiest.”

You should blush to deserve the least reproach from the Countess. What sort of a woman is it you seem to prefer to her – a woman without delicacy and without love, a woman who is guided only by the attractions of pleasure, more vain than sensible, more voluptuous than tender, more passionate than affectionate? She seeks; she cherishes in you nothing but your youth and all the advantages that accompany it.

You know what her rival is worth; you know all your wrongdoing with her; you agree that you are a monster of ingratitude; yet, you are unwilling to take it upon yourself to merit her pardon. Truly, Marquis, I do not understand you. I am beginning to believe that Madame de Sévigné was right, when she said that her son knew his duty very well, and could reason like a

philosopher on the subject, but that he was carried away by his passions, so that “he is not a head fool, but a heart fool” (“ce n’est pas par la tête qu’il est fou, mais par le coeur”).

You recall in vain what I said to you long ago about making love in a free and easy manner. You will remember that I was then enjoying myself with some jocular reflections, which were not intended to be formal advice. Do not forget, either, that the question then was about a mere passing fancy, and not of an ordinary mistress. But the case today is very different, you cannot find among all the women of Paris, a single one who can be compared with her you are so cruelly abandoning. And for what reason – because her resistance wounds your vanity? What resource is left us to hold you?

I agree with you, nevertheless, that when a passion is extinguished, it cannot be re-lighted without difficulty. No one is more the master of loving than he is of not loving. I feel the truth of all these maxims; I do homage to them with regret, as soon as, with a knowledge of the cause, I consider that you reject what is excellent and accept the worse; you renounce a solid happiness, durable pleasures, and yield to depraved tastes and pure caprices; but I can see that all my reflections will not reform you. I am beginning to fear that I am wearying you with morals, and to tell you the truth, it is very ridiculous in me to preach constancy when it is certain that you do not love, and that you are a heart fool.

I therefore abandon you to your destiny, without, however, giving up my desire to follow you into new follies. Why should I be afflicted? Would it be of any moment to assume with you the tone of a pedagogue? Assuredly not, both of us would lose too much thereby. I should become weary and you would not be reformed.