

*XX – The Half-way House to Love*

The rival you have been given appears to me to be all the more redoubtable, as he is the sort of a man I have been advising you to be. I know the Chevalier; nobody is more competent than he to carry a seduction to a successful conclusion. I am willing to wager anything that his heart has never been touched. He makes advances to the Countess in cold blood. You are lost. A lover as passionate as you have appeared to be makes a thousand blunders. The most favorable designs would perish under your management. He permits everybody to take the advantage of him on every occasion. Indeed, such is his misfortune that his precipitation and his timidity injure his prospects by turns.

A man who makes love for the pleasure he finds in it, profits by the smallest advantage; he knows the feeble places and makes himself master of them. Everything leads his way; everything is combined for his purpose. Even his imprudences are often the result of wise reflection; they help him along the road to success; they finally acquire so superior a position that, from their beginning, so to speak, dates the hour of his triumph.

You must be careful, Marquis, not to go to extremes; you must not show the Countess enough love to lead her to understand the excess of your passion. Give her something to be anxious about; compel her to take heed lest she lose you, by giving her opportunities to think that

she may. There is no woman on Earth who will treat you more cavalierly than one who is absolutely certain that your love will not fail her. Like a merchant for whose goods you have manifested too great an anxiety to acquire, she will overcharge you, with as little regard to consequences. Moderate, therefore, your imprudent vivacity; manifest less passion and you will excite more in her heart. We do not appreciate the worth of a prize more than when we are on the point of losing it. Some regulation in matters of love is indispensable for the happiness of both parties. I think I am even justified in advising you on certain occasions to be a trifle unprincipled. On all other occasions, though, it is better to be a dupe than a knave, but in affairs of gallantry, it is only the fools who are the dupes, and knaves always have the laugh on their side. Adieu.

I have not the conscience to leave you without a word of consolation. Do not be discouraged. However redoubtable may be the Chevalier, let your heart rest in peace. I suspect that the cunning Countess is making a play with him to worry you. I have no desire to flatter you, but it gives me pleasure to say, that you are worth more than he. You are young, you are making your debut in the world, and you are regarded as a man who has never yet had any love affairs. The Chevalier has lived; what woman will not appreciate these differences?