

*XXII – Vanity and Self-Esteem Obstacles to Love*

A silence of ten days, Marquis – you begin to worry me in earnest. The application you made of my counsel has, then, been successful? I congratulate you. What I do not approve, however, is your dissatisfaction with her for refusing to make the confession you desired. The words “I love you” seem to be something precious in your estimation. For fifteen days you have been trying to penetrate the sentiments of the Countess, and you have succeeded; you know her affection for you. What more can you possibly want? What further right over her heart would a confession give you? Truly, I consider you a strange character. You ought to know that nothing is more calculated to cause a reasonable woman to revolt, than the obstinacy with which ordinary men insist upon a declaration of their love. I fail to understand you. Ought not her refusal, to be a thousand times more precious to a delicate minded lover, than a positive declaration? Will you ever know your real interests? Instead of persecuting a woman on such a point, expend your energies in concealing from her the extent of her affection. Act so that she will love you before you call her attention to the fact, before compelling her to resort to the necessity of proclaiming it. Is it possible to experience a situation more delicious than that of seeing a heart interested in you without suspicion, growing toward you by degrees, finally becoming affectionate? What a pleasure to enjoy secretly all her movements, to direct her sentiments, augment them, hasten them, and glory in the victory, even before she has suspected that you have essayed her defeat. That is what I call pleasure.

Believe me, Marquis, your conduct toward the Countess must be as if the open avowal of her love for you, had escaped her. Of a truth, she has not said in words, “I love you,” but it is because she really loves you that she has refrained from saying it. Otherwise she has done everything to convince you of it.

Women are under no ordinary embarrassment. They desire for the very least, as much to confess their affection as you are anxious to ascertain it, but what do you expect, Marquis? Women ingenious at raising obstacles, have attached a certain shame to any avowal of their passion, and whatever idea you men may have formed of our way of thinking, such an avowal always humiliates us, for however small may be our experience, we comprehend all the consequences. The words “I love you” are not criminal, that is true, but their sequel frightens us, hence we find means to dissimulate, and close our eyes to the liabilities they carry with them.

Besides this, be on your guard – your persistence in requiring an open avowal from the Countess is less the work of love than a persevering vanity. I defy you to find a mistake in the true motives behind your insistence. Nature has given woman a wonderful instinct – it enables her to discern without mistake whatever grows out of a passion in one who is a stranger to her. Always indulgent toward the effects produced by a love we have inspired, we will pardon you many imprudences, many transports; how can I enumerate them all? All the follies of which you lovers are capable, we pardon, but you will always find us intractable when our self-esteem meets your own. Who would believe it? You inspire us to revolt at things that have nothing to do with your happiness. Your vanity sticks at trifles, and prevents you from enjoying actual advantages. Will you believe me when I say it? You will drop your idle fancies, to delight in the certainty that you are beloved by an adorable woman, to taste the pleasure of hiding the extent of her love from herself, to rejoice in its security. Suppose by force of importunities you should extract an “I love you,” what would you gain by it? Would your uncertainty reach an end? Would you know whether you owe the avowal to love or complaisance? I think I know women; I ought to. They can deceive you by a

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studied confession that the lips only pronounce, but you will never be the involuntary witness of a passion you force from them. The true, flatter-

ing avowals we make, are not those we utter, but those that escape us without our knowledge.