

*XXIV – An Abuse of Credulity is Intolerable*

The Countess no longer retreats? You think she has no other object in view than to put your love to the proof? Whatever preference you have manifested for her, however little precaution you have taken to testify to your passion, she finds nothing in you but cause for scolding. The least excuse, however, and the reproaches die upon her lips, and her anger is so delightful that you do everything to deserve it. Permit me to share in your joy with all my heart. But although this behavior flatters you, if you consider that such acts are not intended to be of long duration, how badly reasonable women, who value their reputation, misunderstand their true interests by thus multiplying through an affected incredulity, occasions for slandering them. Do they not understand and feel that it is not always the moment when they are tender, which gives a blow to their reputation? The doubt they cast upon the sincerity of the affection they have inspired does them more harm in the eyes of the world than even their defeat. As long as they continue incredulous the slightest imprudence compromises them. They dispose of their reputation at retail.

Whenever a lover finds a woman incredulous of the truth of his sentiments, he goes full lengths, every time he has an opportunity, to furnish proofs of his sincerity. The most indiscreet eagerness, the most marked preferences, the most assiduous attentions, seem to him, the best means of succeeding. Can he make use of them without calling the attention of the whole world to the fact; without offending every other woman and giving them occasions to be revenged by their sharpest arrows? As soon as the preliminaries are settled, that is to say, as soon as we commence to believe ourselves sincerely loved, nothing appears on the surface, nothing happens; and if outsiders perceive our liaison, if they put a malicious construction

upon it, it will only be by the recollection of what passed during a time when love was in question.

I would, for the good of everybody concerned, that as soon as a woman ceases to find any pleasure in the society of a man who wishes to please her, that she could tell him so clearly and dismiss him, without abusing his credulity, or giving him ground for vain hopes. But I would also, that as soon as a woman is persuaded that a man loves her, she could consent to it in good faith, reserving to herself, however, the right to be further entreated, to such a point as she may deem apropos, before making an avowal that she feels as tenderly disposed toward her lover, as he is toward her. For, a woman cannot pretend to doubt without putting her lover to the necessity of dissipating her doubts, and he cannot do that successfully without taking the whole world into his confidence by a too marked homage.

I know very well that these ideas would not have been probable in times when the ignorance of men rendered so many women intractable; but, in these times when the audacity of our assailants leaves us so few resources, in these times, I say, when, since the invention of powder, there are few impregnable places, why undertake a prolonged formal siege, when it is certain that after much labor and many disasters it will be necessary to capitulate?

Bring your amiable Countess to reason; show her the inconveniences of a prolonged disregard of your sentiments. You will convince her of your passion; you will compel her to believe you through regard for her reputation, and still better, perhaps, you will furnish her with an additional reason for giving you a confidence she doubtless now finds it difficult to withhold from you.