

### XXXII – *The Advantages of a Knowledge of the Heart*

Well, Marquis, here I am back again, but the news I bring you may not be altogether to your liking. You have never had so fine an occasion to charge women with caprice. I wrote you the last time to tell you that you were loved, today I write just the contrary.

A strange resolution has been taken against you; tremble, 'tis a thing settled: the Countess purposes loving you at her ease, and without its costing her any disturbance of her peace of mind. She has seen the consequences of a passion similar to yours, and she cannot face it without dismay. She intends, therefore, to arrest its progress. Do not let the proofs she has given you reassure you. You men imagine that as soon as a woman has confessed her love she can never more break her chains. Undeceive yourself. The Countess is much more reasonable on your account than I thought, and I do not hide from you the fact that a portion of her firmness is due to my advice. You need not rely any more on my letters, and you do not require any help from them to understand women.

I sometimes regret that I have furnished you weapons against my sex, without them would you ever have been able to touch the heart of the Countess? I must avow that I have judged women with too much rigor, and you now see me ready to make them a reparation. I know it now; there are more stable and essentially virtuous women than I had thought.

What a stock of reason! What a combination of all the estimable qualities in our friend! No, Marquis, I could no longer withhold from her the sentiment of my most tender esteem, and without consulting your interests; I have united with her against you. You will murmur at this, but the confidence she has given me, does it not demand this return on my part? I will not hide from you any of my wickedness; I have carried malice to the point of instructing her in the advantages you might draw from everything I have written you about women.

"I feel," she said to me, "how redoubtable is a lover who combines with so much knowledge of the heart, the talent to express himself in such noble and delicate language. What advantages can he not have of women who reason? I have remarked it; it is by his powers of reasoning that he has overcome them. He possesses the art of employing the intelligence he finds in a woman to justify, in the eyes of his reason, the errors into which he draws her. Besides, a woman in love thinks she is obliged to proportion her sacrifices to the good qualities of the man she loves. To an ordinary man, a weakness is a weakness, he blushes at it; to a man of intelligence, it is a tribute paid to his merits, it is even a proof of our discernment; he eulogizes our good taste and takes the credit of it. It is thus by turning it to the profit of the vanity which he rescues from virtue, that this enchanter hides from our eyes the grades of our weakness."

Such are at present, Marquis, the sentiments of the Countess, and I am not sure if they leave you much to hope for. I do not ignore the fact that it might have doubtless been better to carry out the project we have in view, without giving you any information concerning it. That was our first intention, but could I in conscience secretly work against you? Would it not have been to betray you? Moreover, by taking that course, we should have appeared to be afraid of you, and hence we found courage to put you in possession of all we expect to do to resist you.

Come, now, Marquis, our desire to see you really makes us impatient. Would you know the reason? It is because we expect you without fearing you. Remember that you have not now a weak loving woman to fight against, she would be too feeble an adversary, her courage might give out; it is I, now, it is a woman of cold blood, who fancies herself interested in saving the reason of her friend from being wrecked. Yes, I will penetrate to the bottom of your heart; I will read there your perverse designs; I will

forestall them; I will render all the artifices of your malice innocuous.

You may accuse me of treason as much as you please, but come tonight, and I will convince you that my conduct is conformable to the most exact equity. While your inexperience needed enlightenment, assistance, encouragement, my zeal in your cause urged me to sacrifice everything in your interests. Every advantage was then on the side of the Countess. But now there is a different face on things; all her pride today, is barely strong enough to resist you. Formerly, her indifference was in her favor, and, what was worth still more, your lack of skill; today you have the experience, and she has her reason the less.

After that, to combine with you against her, to betray the confidence she reposes in me, to refuse her the succor she has the right to expect from me, if you are sincere, you will avow it yourself, would be a crying wrong. Henceforth, I purpose to repair the evil I have done in revealing our secrets, by initiating you into our mysteries. I do not know why, but the pleasure I feel in crossing you, appears to be working in my favor, and you know how far my rights over you extend. My sentiments will always be the same, and, on your part without doubt, you are too equitable to diminish your esteem for me, because of anything I may have done in favor of a friend.

By and by, then, at the Countess'.