

*XXXIII – A Heart Once Wounded No Longer Plays with Love*

What, Marquis, afraid of two women? You already despair of your affairs, because they oppose your success, and you are ready to abandon the game? Dear me, I thought you had more courage. It is true that the firmness of the Countess astonishes even me, but I do not understand how she could hold out against your ardor for an entire evening. I never saw you so seductive, and she has just confessed to me that you were never so redoubtable. Now I can respond for her, since her courage did not fail her on an occasion of so much peril. I saw still farther, and I judge from her well-sustained ironical conversation, that she is only moderately smitten. A woman really wounded by the shaft of love would not have played with sentiment in such a flippant manner.

This gives birth to a strange idea. It would be very delightful, if in a joking way, we should discover that your tender Adelaide does not love you up to a certain point. What a blow that would be to your vanity! But you would quickly seek revenge. You might certainly find beauties ready to console you for your loss. How often has vexation made you say, "What is a woman's heart? Can any one give me a definition of it?"

However, do you know that I am tempted to find fault with you, and if you take this too much to heart, I do not know what I would not do to soften the situation. But I know you are strong-minded. Your first feelings of displeasure past, you will soon see that the best thing you can do is to come down to the quality of

friend, a position which we have so generously offered you. You ought to consider yourself very fortunate, your dismissal might be made absolute. But do not make this out to be much of a victory; you will be more harshly treated if we consider you more to be feared.

Adieu, Marquis. The Countess, who is sitting at the head of my bed, sends you a thousand tender things. She is edified by the discretion with which you have treated us; not to insist when two ladies seem to be so contrary to you, that is the height of gallantry. So much modesty will certainly disarm them, and may some day move them to pity. Hope, that is permitted you.

From the Countess:

Although you may be inspired by the most flattering hopes, Marquis, I will add a few words to this letter. I have not read it, but I suspect that it refers to me. I wish, however, to write you with my own hand that we shall be alone here all day. I wish to tell you that I love you moderately well at present, but that I have the greatest desire in the world not to love you at all. However, if you deem it advisable to come and trouble our little party, it gives me pleasure to warn you that your heart will be exposed to the greatest danger. I am told that I am handsomer today than you have ever found me to be, and I never felt more in the humor to treat you badly.