

XXXV – The Heart Should be Played Upon Like the Keys of a Piano

I am beginning to understand, Marquis, that the only way to live with the most reasonable woman, is never to meddle with her heart affairs. I have, therefore, made up my mind. Henceforward I shall never mention your name to the Countess, unless she insists upon my doing so; I do not like bickerings.

But this resolution will change nothing of my sentiments for you, nor my friendship for her. And, although I still stand her friend, I shall not scruple to make use of my friendship, so far as you are concerned, as I have in the past. I shall continue, since you so wish it, to give you my ideas on the situations in which you may become involved, on condition, however, that you permit me sometimes to laugh at your expense, a liberty I shall not take today, because if the Countess follows up the plan she has formed, that is, if she persists in refusing to see you alone, I do not see that your affairs will advance very rapidly. She remembers what I told her, she knows her heart, and has reason to fear it.

It is only an imprudent woman who relies upon her own strength, and exposes herself without anxiety to the advances of the man she loves. The agitation that animates him, the fire with which his whole person appears to be burning, excites our senses, fires our imag-

ination, appeals to our desires. I said to the Countess one day, "We resemble your clavecin – however well disposed it may be to respond to the hand which should play upon it, until it feels the impression of that hand, it remains silent; touch its keys, and sounds are heard." Finish the parallel, and draw your conclusions.

But after all, why should you complain, Monsieur, the metaphysician? To see the Countess, hear the soft tones of her voice, render her little attentions, carry the delicacy of sentiment beyond the range of mortal vision, feel edified at her discourses on virtue, are not these supreme felicity for you? Leave for earthy souls the gross sentiments, which are beginning to develop in you. To look at you today, it might be said that I was not so far out of the way when I declared love to be the work of the senses. Your own experience will compel you to avow that I had some good reason for saying so, for which I am not at all sorry. Consider yourself punished for your injustice. Adieu.

Your old rival, the Chevalier, has revenged himself for the rigors of the Countess, by tying himself up with the Marquise, her relative. This choice is assuredly a eulogy on his good taste; they are made for each other. I shall be very much charmed to know whither their fine passion will lead them.