

XXXVI – Mistaken Impressions Common to All Women

Do you think, Marquis, that I have not felt all the sarcasm you have deigned to turn against me on account of my pretended reconciliation with the Countess? Know this, sir – that we have never been at outs.

It is true, she begged me to forget her vivacity, which she claimed was due to her love, and she insisted that I should continue to give her good counsel. But Good Heavens! Of what use are my counsels, except to provide you with an additional triumph? The best advice I can give her is to break off her relations with you, for whatever confidence she may have in her pride, her only preservative against you is flight. She believes, for example, that she used her reason with good effect in the conversation you have related to me. But every reasonable woman does not fail to use the same language, as soon as a lover shows her some respectful pretensions.

“I only want your heart,” they say, “your sentiments, your esteem is all I desire. Alas! you will find only too many women with so little delicacy as to believe themselves very happy in accepting what I refuse. I will never envy them a happiness of that kind.”

Be on your guard, Marquis, and do not openly combat such fine sentiments; to doubt a woman’s sincerity on such occasions is to do more than offend them – it is to be maladroit. You must applaud their mistaken idea if you would profit by it. They wish to appear high-minded, and sensible only of the pleasures of the soul; it is their system, their *esprit du corps*. If some women are in good faith on this point, how many are there who treat it as an illusion and wish to impose it upon you?

But whatever may be the reason that impels them to put you on a false scent, ought you not to be delighted that they are willing to take the

trouble to deceive you? What obligations are you not under? They give in this manner, a high value to those who, without it, would be very undesirable. Admire our strategy when we feign indifference to what you call the pleasures of love, pretending even to be far removed from its sweetness; we augment the grandeur of the sacrifice we make for you, by it, we even inspire the gratitude of the authors of the very benefits we receive from them, you are satisfied with the good you do us.

And since it was said that we make it a duty to deceive you, what obligation do you not owe us

We have chosen the most obliging way to do it. You are the first to gain by this deceit, for we cannot multiply obstacles without enhancing the price of your victory. Troubles, cares, are not these the money with which lovers pay for their pleasures? What a satisfaction for your vanity, to be able to say within yourselves, “This woman, so refined, so insensible to the impressions of the senses; this woman who fears disdain so much, comes to me, nevertheless, and sacrifices her repugnance, her fears, her pride? My own merit, the charms of my person, my skill, have surmounted invincible objects for something quite different. How satisfied I am with my prowess!”

If women acted in good faith, if they were in as much haste to show you their desires, as you are to penetrate them, you could not talk that way. How many pleasures lost! But you cannot impute wrong to this artifice, it gives birth to so many advantages. Pretend to be deceived, and it will become a pleasure to you.

If the Countess knew what I have written, how she would reproach me!