

XXXVII – The Allurements of Stage Women

I know too well that a man in your position, particularly a military man, is often exposed to bad company, consequently, he is attracted by the divinities you mention. In spite of that you are not deceived, and I would probably censure you, if I were not so sure, that, in the present state of your heart, the heroines of the theater are not dangerous to you. But the Countess is less indulgent, you say. Her jealousy does not astonish me; she confirms my ideas concerning female metaphysicians. I know how much credit is due their sincerity. Her complaints are very singular, for, what is she deprived of? The women in question are nothing but women of sentiment, and it is to sentiment that the Countess is attached.

How little women are in accord! They pretend to despise women of the stage; they fear them too much to despise them. But after all, are they wrong to consider them rivals? Are you not more captivated with their free and easy style, than with that of a sensible woman who has nothing to offer but order, decency, and uniformity? With the former, men are at their ease, they appear to be in their element; with the latter, men are kept within bounds, obliged to stand on their dignity, and to beg very respectfully. From the portrait of several of them, I should judge that there are some of them very capable of making many men unfaithful to the most beloved mistress. But with a sensible man, this infidelity, if it be one, cannot be of long duration. These women may create a sudden, lively desire, but never a veritable passion.

The fairies of the operatic stage would be too dangerous, if they had the wit or the humor always to amuse you as much as they do the first time you are thrown on their company. However little jargon, habits, and decency they have on the surface, it is possible that they may please you at first. You men have so little refinement sometimes! The freedom of their conversation, the vivacity of their sallies of alleged wit, their giddy ways, all this affords you a situation that

charms; a lively and silly joy seizes upon you, the hours you pass with them seem to be only moments. But happily for you, they seldom possess sufficient resources to maintain a rôle so amusing. Inasmuch as they lack education and culture, they soon travel around the small circle of their accomplishments. They feed you with the same pleasantries, the same stories, the same antics, and it is seldom one laughs twice at the same thing when one has no esteem for the fun maker.

The Countess need not worry, for I know you well enough to assure her that it is not that class of women she may apprehend; there are in the world, others more redoubtable, they are the "gallant women," those equivocal women in society. They occupy a middle position between good women and those I have been talking about; they associate with the former and are not different from the latter except on the surface. More voluptuous than tender, they seduce by lending to the least refined sentiments an air of passion, which is mistaken for love. They understand how to convey an impression of tenderness to what is only a taste for pleasure. They make you believe that it is by choice, by a knowledge of your merit that they yield. If you do not know them to be gallant women, the shade of difference, which distinguishes the true motives that actuates them, from the sensibility of the heart, is impossible to seize. You accept for excess of passion, what is only an intoxication of the senses. You imagine you are loved because you are lovable, but it is only because you are a man.

These are the women I should fear, if I were in the place of the Countess. The financial woman who has lately appeared in society belongs to this class, but I have already warned the Countess.

I call to mind, here, that in your preceding letter, you mentioned the allurements that the Countess thought proper to manifest? She was right in taking umbrage. Your passion for her

is truly too great to prevent you from sacrificing everything, but I fear you will not always be so honest.

Madame de --- possesses bloom and cheerfulness; she is at an age when women assume charge of young men who desire to be fitted for society, and to learn their first lessons in gal-

lantry. The interesting and affectionate disposition you find in her will have its effect, but be careful – it is I who warn you. Although I despise such women, it happens that they have the power to create attachments; they often find the secret of making you commit more follies than any of the other women.