

### *XXXVIII – Varieties of Resistance are Essential*

I hasten to tell you, Marquis, that I have just maintained a thesis against Monsieur de la Bruyère. No doubt you admire my temerity? However, it is true. He pretends that Corneille described men as they should be, and Racine as they are; I held the contrary. We had some illustrious spectators of the dispute, and I ought to be very proud of the suffrages in my favor.

But all the details would be too long to write you, so come and we will talk them over. Every one has his own fashion of describing things; I have mine, I know. I represent women as they are, and I am very sorry not to be able to represent them as they should be. Now I shall reply to your letter.

The species of languor that affects you does not surprise me. The malady that afflicts the Marquise has deprived you of the pleasure of seeing the Countess, and your heart remaining in the same condition for three days, it is not surprising that ennui should have gained upon it. Neither does your present indifference for the Countess alarm me. In the greatest passions, there are always moments of lukewarmness, which astonish the hearts that feel the sensation. Whether the heart, constantly agitated by the same emotions, finally tires, or whether it is absolutely impossible for it to be always employed with the same object, there are moments of indifference, the cause of which cannot be ascertained. The livelier the emotions of the heart, the more profound the calm that is sure to follow, and it is this calm that is always more fateful to the object loved than storm and agitation. Love is extinguished by a resistance too severe or constant. But an intelligent woman goes beyond that, she varies her manner of resisting; this is the sublimity of the art.

Now, with the Countess, the duties of friendship are preferable to the claims of love, and that is another reason for your indifference toward her. Love is a jealous and tyrannical sentiment, which is never satiated until the object

loved has sacrificed upon its altar all desires and passions. You do nothing for it unless you do everything. Whenever you prefer duty, friendship, etc., it claims the right to complain. It demands revenge. The small courtesies you deemed it necessary to show Madame de --- are proofs of it. I would have much preferred, though, you had not carried them so far as accompanying her home. The length of time you passed in her company, the pleasure you experienced in conversing with her, the questions she put to you on the state of your heart, all goes to prove the truth of what I said in my last letter. It is vain for you to protest that you came away more amorous than ever of the Countess; your embarrassment when she inquired whether you had remained long with your "fermière générale," the attempt you made to deceive her by, an evasive answer, the extreme care you took to disarm her slightest suspicion, are indications to me that you are far more guilty than you pretend, or than you are aware of yourself.

The Countess suffers the consequences of all that. Do you not see how she affects to rouse your jealousy by praising the Chevalier, your ancient rival? For once, I can assure you that you will not so soon be affected by the languors we mentioned a short time ago. Jealousy will give you something to think about. Do you count for nothing, the sufferings of the Marquise? You will soon see her, the ravages of the smallpox will not alone disfigure her face, for her disposition will be very different, as soon as she learns the extent of her misfortune. How I pity her; how I pity other women! With what cordiality she will hate them and tear them to tatters! The Countess is her best friend; will she be so very long? She is so handsome her complexion casts the others in the shade. What storms I foresee!

I had forgotten to quarrel with you about your treatment of me. You have been so indiscreet as to show my recent letters to M. de la

Rochefoucauld. I will cease writing you if you continue to divulge my secret. I am willing to talk personally with him about my ideas, but I

am far from flattering myself, that I write well enough to withstand the criticism of a reader like him.