

*XVI – How to Be Victorious in Love*

Is what you write me possible, Marquis, what, the Countess continues obdurate? The flip-pant manner in which she receives your attentions reveals an indifference that grieves you? I think I have guessed the secret of the riddle. I know you. You are gay, playful, conceited even, with women as long as they do not impress you. But with those who have made an impression upon your heart, I have noticed that you are timid. This quality might affect a bourgeoisie, but you must attack the heart of a woman of the world with other weapons. The Countess knows the ways of the world. Believe me, and leave to the Celadons, such things as sublime talk, beautiful sentiments; let them spin out perfection. I tell you on behalf of women: there is not one of us who does not prefer a little rough handling to too much consideration. Men lose through blundering more hearts than virtue saves.

The more timidity a lover shows with us, the more it concerns our pride to goad him on; the more respect he has for our resistance, the more respect we demand of him. We would willingly say to you men, “Ah, in pity’s name do not suppose us to be so very virtuous; you are forcing us to have too much of it. Do not put so high a price upon your conquest; do not treat our defeat as if it were something difficult. Accustom our imagination by degrees to seeing you doubt our indifference.”

When we see a lover, although he may be persuaded of our gratitude, treat us with the consideration demanded by our vanity. We shall conclude, without being aware of it, that he will always be the same, although sure of our inclination for him. From that moment, what confidence will he not inspire? What flattering progress may he not make? But if he notifies us to be always on our guard, then it is not our hearts we shall defend; it will not be a battle to preserve our virtue, but our pride, and that is the worst enemy to be conquered in women. What more is there to tell you? We are continually struggling to hide the fact that we have permitted ourselves to be loved. Put a woman in a position to say that she has yielded only to a species of violence, or to surprise; persuade her that you do not undervalue her, and I will answer for her heart.

You must manage the Countess as her character requires – she is lively, and playful, and by trifling follies you must lead her to love. Do not even let her see that she distinguishes you from other men, and be as playful as she is light hearted. Fix yourself in her heart without giving her any warning of your intention. She will love you without knowing it, and some day she will be very much astonished at having made so much headway without really suspecting it.