

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF
MARRIAGE, PART 3

Оноре де Бальзак

The Physiology of Marriage, Part 3

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Honoré de Balzac
The Physiology of Marriage, Part 3
RELATING TO CIVIL WAR

*"Lovely as the seraphs of Klopstock,
Terrible as the devils of Milton."*

– DIDEROT.

MEDITATION XXIII

OF MANIFESTOES

The Preliminary precepts, by which science has been enabled at this point to put weapons into the hand of a husband, are few in number; it is not of so much importance to know whether he will be vanquished, as to examine whether he can offer any resistance in the conflict.

Meanwhile, we will set up here certain beacons to light up the arena where a husband is soon to find himself, in alliance with religion and law, engaged single-handed in a contest with his wife, who is supported by her native craft and the whole usages of society as her allies.

LXXXII.

Anything may be expected and anything may be supposed of a woman who is in love.

LXXXIII.

The actions of a woman who intends to deceive her husband are almost always the result of study, but never dictated by reason.

LXXXIV. The greater number of women advance like the fleas, by erratic leaps and bounds, They owe their escape to the height or depth of their first ideas, and any interruption of their plans rather favors their execution. But they operate only within a narrow area which it is easy for the husband to make still narrower; and if he keeps cool he will end by extinguishing this piece of living saltpetre.

LXXXV.

A husband should never allow himself to address a single disparaging remark to his wife, in presence of a third party.

LXXXVI. The moment a wife decides to break her marriage vow she reckons her husband as everything or nothing. All defensive operations must start from this proposition.

LXXXVII. The life of a woman is either of the head, of the heart, or of passion. When a woman reaches the age to form an estimate of life, her husband ought to find out whether the primary cause of her intended infidelity proceeds from vanity, from sentiment or from temperament. Temperament may be remedied like disease; sentiment is something in which the husband may find great opportunities of success; but vanity is incurable. A woman whose life is of the head may be a terrible scourge. She combines the faults of a passionate woman with those of the tender-hearted woman, without having their palliations. She is destitute alike of pity, love, virtue or sex.

LXXXVIII. A woman whose life is of the head will strive to inspire her husband with indifference; the woman whose life is of the heart, with hatred; the passionate woman, with disgust.

LXXXIX.

A husband never loses anything by appearing to believe in the fidelity of his wife, by preserving an air of patience and by keeping silence.

Silence especially troubles a woman amazingly.

XC. To show himself aware of the passion of his wife is the mark of a fool; but to affect ignorance of all proves that a man has sense, and this is in fact the only attitude to take. We are taught, moreover, that everybody in France is sensible.

XCI. The rock most to be avoided is ridicule. – "At least, let us be affectionate in public," ought to be the maxim of a married establishment. For both the married couple to lose honor, esteem, consideration, respect and all that is worth living for in society, is to become a nonentity.

These axioms relate to the contest alone. As for the catastrophe, others will be needed for that.

We have called this crisis *Civil War* for two reasons; never was a war more really intestine and at the same time so polite as this war. But in what point and in what manner does this fatal war break out? You do not believe that your wife will call out regiments and sound the trumpet, do you? She will, perhaps, have a commanding officer, but that is all. And this feeble army corps will be sufficient to destroy the peace of your establishment.

"You forbid me to see the people that I like!" is an exordium which has served for a manifesto in most homes. This phrase, with all the ideas that are concomitant, is oftenest employed by vain and artificial women.

The most usual manifesto is that which is proclaimed in the conjugal bed, the principal theatre of war. This subject will be treated in detail in the Meditation entitled: *Of Various Weapons*, in the paragraph, *Of Modesty in its Connection with Marriage*.

Certain women of a lymphatic temperament will pretend to have the spleen and will even feign death, if they can only gain thereby the benefit of a secret divorce.

But most of them owe their independence to the execution of a plan, whose effect upon the majority of husbands is unfailing and whose perfidies we will now reveal.

One of the greatest of human errors springs from the belief that our honor and our reputation are founded upon our actions, or result from the approbation which the general conscience bestows upon our conduct. A man who lives in the world is born to be a slave to public opinion. Now a private man in France has less opportunity of influencing the world than his wife, although he has ample occasion for ridiculing it. Women possess to a marvelous degree the art of giving color by specious arguments to the recriminations in which they indulge. They never set up any defence, excepting when they are in the wrong, and in this proceeding they are pre-eminent, knowing how to oppose arguments by precedents, proofs by assertions, and thus they very often obtain victory in minor matters of detail. They see and know with admirable penetration, when one of them presents to another a weapon which she herself is forbidden to whet. It is thus that they sometimes lose a husband without intending it. They apply the match and long afterwards are terror-stricken at the conflagration.

As a general thing, all women league themselves against a married man who is accused of tyranny; for a secret tie unites them all, as it unites all priests of the same religion. They hate each other, yet shield each other. You can never gain over more than one of them; and yet this act of seduction would be a triumph for your wife.

You are, therefore, outlawed from the feminine kingdom. You see ironical smiles on every lip, you meet an epigram in every answer. These clever creatures force their daggers and amuse themselves by sculpturing the handle before dealing you a graceful blow.

The treacherous art of reservation, the tricks of silence, the malice of suppositions, the pretended good nature of an inquiry, all these arts are employed against you. A man who undertakes to subjugate his wife is an example too dangerous to escape destruction from them, for will not his conduct call up against them the satire of every husband? Moreover, all of them will attack you, either by bitter witticisms, or by serious arguments, or by the hackneyed maxims of gallantry. A swarm of celibates will support all their sallies and you will be assailed and persecuted as an original, a tyrant, a bad bed-fellow, an eccentric man, a man not to be trusted.

Your wife will defend you like the bear in the fable of La Fontaine; she will throw paving stones at your head to drive away the flies that alight on it. She will tell you in the evening all the things that have been said about you, and will ask an explanation of acts which you never committed, and of words which you never said. She professes to have justified you for faults of which you are innocent;

she has boasted of a liberty which she does not possess, in order to clear you of the wrong which you have done in denying that liberty. The deafening rattle which your wife shakes will follow you everywhere with its obtrusive din. Your darling will stun you, will torture you, meanwhile arming herself by making you feel only the thorns of married life. She will greet you with a radiant smile in public, and will be sullen at home. She will be dull when you are merry, and will make you detest her merriment when you are moody. Your two faces will present a perpetual contrast.

Very few men have sufficient force of mind not to succumb to this preliminary comedy, which is always cleverly played, and resembles the *hourra* raised by the Cossacks, as they advance to battle. Many husbands become irritated and fall into irreparable mistakes. Others abandon their wives. And, indeed, even those of superior intelligence do not know how to get hold of the enchanted ring, by which to dispel this feminine phantasmagoria.

Two-thirds of such women are enabled to win their independence by this single manoeuvre, which is no more than a review of their forces. In this case the war is soon ended.

But a strong man who courageously keeps cool throughout this first assault will find much amusement in laying bare to his wife, in a light and bantering way, the secret feelings which make her thus behave, in following her step by step through the labyrinth which she treads, and telling her in answer to her every remark, that she is false to herself, while he preserves throughout a tone of pleasantry and never becomes excited.

Meanwhile war is declared, and if her husband has not been dazzled by these first fireworks, a woman has yet many other resources for securing her triumph; and these it is the purpose of the following Meditations to discover.

MEDITATION XXIV

PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGY

The Archduke Charles published a very fine treatise on military under the title *Principles of Strategy in Relation to the Campaigns of 1796*. These principles seem somewhat to resemble poetic canons prepared for poems already published. In these days we are become very much more energetic, we invent rules to suit works and works to suit rules. But of what use were ancient principles of military art in presence of the impetuous genius of Napoleon? If, to-day, however, we reduce to a system the lessons taught by this great captain whose new tactics have destroyed the ancient ones, what future guarantee do we possess that another Napoleon will not yet be born? Books on military art meet, with few exceptions, the fate of ancient works on Chemistry and Physics. Everything is subject to change, either constant or periodic.

This, in a few words, is the history of our work.

So long as we have been dealing with a woman who is inert or lapped in slumber, nothing has been easier than to weave the meshes with which we have bound her; but the moment she wakes up and begins to struggle, all is confusion and complication. If a husband would make an effort to recall the principles of the system which we have just described in order to involve his wife in the nets which our second part has set for her, he would resemble Wurmser, Mack and Beaulieu arranging their halts and their marches while Napoleon nimbly turns their flank, and makes use of their own tactics to destroy them.

This is just what your wife will do.

How is it possible to get at the truth when each of you conceals it under the same lie, each setting the same trap for the other? And whose will be the victory when each of you is caught in a similar snare?

"My dear, I have to go out; I have to pay a visit to Madame So and So. I have ordered the carriage. Would you like to come with me? Come, be good, and go with your wife."

You say to yourself:

"She would be nicely caught if I consented! She asks me only to be refused."

Then you reply to her:

"Just at the moment I have some business with Monsieur Blank, for he has to give a report in a business matter which deeply concerns us both, and I must absolutely see him. Then I must go to the Minister of Finance. So your arrangement will suit us both."

"Very well, dearest, go and dress yourself, while Celine finishes dressing me; but don't keep me waiting."

"I am ready now, love," you cry out, at the end of ten minutes, as you stand shaved and dressed.

But all is changed. A letter has arrived; madame is not well; her dress fits badly; the dressmaker has come; if it is not the dressmaker it is your mother. Ninety-nine out of a hundred husbands will leave the house satisfied, believing that their wives are well guarded, when, as a matter of fact, the wives have gotten rid of them.

A lawful wife who from her husband cannot escape, who is not distressed by pecuniary anxiety, and who in order to give employment to a vacant mind, examines night and day the changing tableaux of each day's experience, soon discovers the mistake she has made in falling into a trap or allowing herself to be surprised by a catastrophe; she will then endeavor to turn all these weapons against you.

There is a man in society, the sight of whom is strangely annoying to your wife; she can tolerate neither his tone, his manners nor his way of regarding things. Everything connected with him is

revolting to her; she is persecuted by him, he is odious to her; she hopes that no one will tell him this. It seems almost as if she were attempting to oppose you; for this man is one for whom you have the highest esteem. You like his disposition because he flatters you; and thus your wife presumes that your esteem for him results from flattered vanity. When you give a ball, an evening party or a concert, there is almost a discussion on this subject, and madame picks a quarrel with you, because you are compelling her to see people who are not agreeable to her.

"At least, sir, I shall never have to reproach myself with omitting to warn you. That man will yet cause you trouble. You should put some confidence in women when they pass sentence on the character of a man. And permit me to tell you that this baron, for whom you have such a predilection, is a very dangerous person, and you are doing very wrong to bring him to your house. And this is the way you behave; you absolutely force me to see one whom I cannot tolerate, and if I ask you to invite Monsieur A – , you refuse to do so, because you think that I like to have him with me! I admit that he talks well, that he is kind and amiable; but you are more to me than he can ever be."

These rude outlines of feminine tactics, which are emphasized by insincere gestures, by looks of feigned ingenuousness, by artful intonations of the voice and even by the snare of cunning silence, are characteristic to some degree of their whole conduct.

There are few husbands who in such circumstances as these do not form the idea of setting a mouse-trap; they welcome as their guests both Monsieur A – and the imaginary baron who represents the person whom their wives abhor, and they do so in the hope of discovering a lover in the celibate who is apparently beloved.

Oh yes, I have often met in the world young men who were absolutely starlings in love and complete dupes of a friendship which women pretended to show them, women who felt themselves obliged to make a diversion and to apply a blister to their husbands as their husbands had previously done to them! These poor innocents pass their time in running errands, in engaging boxes at the theatre, in riding in the Bois de Boulogne by the carriages of their pretended mistresses; they are publicly credited with possessing women whose hands they have not even kissed. Vanity prevents them from contradicting these flattering rumors, and like the young priests who celebrate masses without a Host, they enjoy a mere show passion, and are veritable supernumeraries of love.

Under these circumstances sometimes a husband on returning home asks the porter: "Has no one been here?" – "M. le Baron came past at two o'clock to see monsieur; but as he found no one was in but madame he went away; but Monsieur A – is with her now."

You reach the drawing-room, you see there a young celibate, sprightly, scented, wearing a fine necktie, in short a perfect dandy. He is a man who holds you in high esteem; when he comes to your house your wife listens furtively for his footsteps; at a ball she always dances with him. If you forbid her to see him, she makes a great outcry and it is not till many years afterwards [see *Meditation on Las Symptoms*] that you see the innocence of Monsieur A – and the culpability of the baron.

We have observed and noted as one of the cleverest manoeuvres, that of a young woman who, carried away by an irresistible passion, exhibited a bitter hatred to the man she did not love, but lavished upon her lover secret intimations of her love. The moment that her husband was persuaded that she loved the *Cicisbeo* and hated the *Patito*, she arranged that she and the *Patito* should be found in a situation whose compromising character she had calculated in advance, and her husband and the execrated celibate were thus induced to believe that her love and her aversion were equally insincere. When she had brought her husband into the condition of perplexity, she managed that a passionate letter should fall into his hands. One evening in the midst of the admirable catastrophe which she had thus brought to a climax, madame threw herself at her husband's feet, wet them with her tears, and thus concluded the climax to her own satisfaction.

"I esteem and honor you profoundly," she cried, "for keeping your own counsel as you have done. I am in love! Is this a sentiment which is easy for me to repress? But what I can do is to confess the fact to you; to implore you to protect me from myself, to save me from my own folly. Be my

master and be a stern master to me; take me away from this place, remove me from what has caused all this trouble, console me; I will forget him, I desire to do so. I do not wish to betray you. I humbly ask your pardon for the treachery love has suggested to me. Yes, I confess to you that the love which I pretended to have for my cousin was a snare set to deceive you. I love him with the love of friendship and no more. – Oh! forgive me! I can love no one but" – her voice was choked in passionate sobs – "Oh! let us go away, let us leave Paris!"

She began to weep; her hair was disheveled, her dress in disarray; it was midnight, and her husband forgave her. From henceforth, the cousin made his appearance without risk, and the Minotaur devoured one victim more.

What instructions can we give for contending with such adversaries as these? Their heads contain all the diplomacy of the congress of Vienna; they have as much power when they are caught as when they escape. What man has a mind supple enough to lay aside brute force and strength and follow his wife through such mazes as these?

To make a false plea every moment, in order to elicit the truth, a true plea in order to unmask falsehood; to charge the battery when least expected, and to spike your gun at the very moment of firing it; to scale the mountain with the enemy, in order to descend to the plain again five minutes later; to accompany the foe in windings as rapid, as obscure as those of a plover on the breezes; to obey when obedience is necessary, and to oppose when resistance is inertial; to traverse the whole scale of hypotheses as a young artist with one stroke runs from the lowest to the highest note of his piano; to divine at last the secret purpose on which a woman is bent; to fear her caresses and to seek rather to find out what are the thoughts that suggested them and the pleasure which she derived from them – this is mere child's play for the man of intellect and for those lucid and searching imaginations which possess the gift of doing and thinking at the same time. But there are a vast number of husbands who are terrified at the mere idea of putting in practice these principles in their dealings with a woman.

Such men as these prefer passing their lives in making huge efforts to become second-class chess-players, or to pocket adroitly a ball in billiards.

Some of them will tell you that they are incapable of keeping their minds on such a constant strain and breaking up the habits of their life. In that case the woman triumphs. She recognizes that in mind and energy she is her husband's superior, although the superiority may be but temporary; and yet there rises in her a feeling of contempt for the head of the house.

If many men fail to be masters in their own house this is not from lack of willingness, but of talent. As for those who are ready to undergo the toils of this terrible duel, it is quite true that they must needs possess great moral force.

And really, as soon as it is necessary to display all the resources of this secret strategy, it is often useless to attempt setting any traps for these satanic creatures. Once women arrive at a point when they willfully deceive, their countenances become as inscrutable as vacancy. Here is an example which came within my own experience.

A very young, very pretty, and very clever coquette of Paris had not yet risen. Seated by her bed was one of her dearest friends. A letter arrived from another, a very impetuous fellow, to whom she had allowed the right of speaking to her like a master. The letter was in pencil and ran as follows:

"I understand that Monsieur C – is with you at this moment. I am waiting for him to blow his brains out."

Madame D – calmly continued the conversation with Monsieur C – . She asked him to hand her a little writing desk of red leather which stood on the table, and he brought it to her.

"Thanks, my dear," she said to him; "go on talking, I am listening to you."

C – talked away and she replied, all the while writing the following note:

"As soon as you become jealous of C – you two can blow out each other's brains at your pleasure. As for you, you may die; but brains – you haven't any brains to blow out."

"My dear friend," she said to C – , "I beg you will light this candle. Good, you are charming. And now be kind enough to leave me and let me get up, and give this letter to Monsieur d'H – , who is waiting at the door."

All this was said with admirable coolness. The tones and intonations of her voice, the expression of her face showed no emotion. Her audacity was crowned with complete success. On receiving the answer from the hand of Monsieur C – , Monsieur d'H – felt his wrath subside. He was troubled with only one thing and that was how to disguise his inclination to laugh.

The more torch-light one flings into the immense cavern which we are now trying to illuminate, the more profound it appears. It is a bottomless abyss. It appears to us that our task will be accomplished more agreeably and more instructively if we show the principles of strategy put into practice in the case of a woman, when she has reached a high degree of vicious accomplishment. An example suggests more maxims and reveals the existence of more methods than all possible theories.

One day at the end of a dinner given to certain intimate friends by Prince Lebrun, the guests, heated by champagne, were discussing the inexhaustible subject of feminine artifice. The recent adventure which was credited to the Countess R. D. S. J. D. A – , apropos of a necklace, was the subject first broached. A highly esteemed artist, a gifted friend of the emperor, was vigorously maintaining the opinion, which seemed somewhat unmanly, that it was forbidden to a man to resist successfully the webs woven by a woman.

"It is my happy experience," he said, "that to them nothing is sacred."

The ladies protested.

"But I can cite an instance in point."

"It is an exception!"

"Let us hear the story," said a young lady.

"Yes, tell it to us," cried all the guests.

The prudent old gentleman cast his eyes around, and, after having formed his conclusions as to the age of the ladies, smiled and said:

"Since we are all experienced in life, I consent to relate the adventure."

Dead silence followed, and the narrator read the following from a little book which he had taken from his pocket:

I was head over ears in love with the Comtesse de – . I was twenty and I was ingenuous. She deceived me. I was angry; she threw me over. I was ingenuous, I repeat, and I was grieved to lose her. I was twenty; she forgave me. And as I was twenty, as I was always ingenuous, always deceived, but never again thrown over by her, I believed myself to have been the best beloved of lovers, consequently the happiest of men. The countess had a friend, Madame de T – , who seemed to have some designs on me, but without compromising her dignity; for she was scrupulous and respected the proprieties. One day while I was waiting for the countess in her Opera box, I heard my name called from a contiguous box. It was Madame de T – .

"What," she said, "already here? Is this fidelity or merely a want of something to do? Won't you come to me?"

Her voice and her manner had a meaning in them, but I was far from inclined at that moment to indulge in a romance.

"Have you any plans for this evening?" she said to me. "Don't make any! If I cheer your tedious solitude you ought to be devoted to me. Don't ask any questions, but obey. Call my servants."

I answered with a bow and on being requested to leave the Opera box, I obeyed.

"Go to this gentleman's house," she said to the lackey. "Say he will not be home till to-morrow."

She made a sign to him, he went to her, she whispered in his ear, and he left us. The Opera began. I tried to venture on a few words, but she silenced me; some one might be listening. The first act ended, the lackey brought back a note, and told her that everything was ready. Then she smiled, asked for my hand, took me off, put me in her carriage, and I started on my journey quite ignorant of

my destination. Every inquiry I made was answered by a peal of laughter. If I had not been aware that this was a woman of great passion, that she had long loved the Marquis de V – , that she must have known I was aware of it, I should have believed myself in good luck; but she knew the condition of my heart, and the Comtesse de – . I therefore rejected all presumptuous ideas and bided my time. At the first stop, a change of horses was supplied with the swiftness of lightning and we started afresh. The matter was becoming serious. I asked with some insistency, where this joke was to end.

"Where?" she said, laughing. "In the pleasantest place in the world, but can't you guess? I'll give you a thousand chances. Give it up, for you will never guess. We are going to my husband's house. Do you know him?"

"Not in the least."

"So much the better, I thought you didn't. But I hope you will like him. We have lately become reconciled. Negotiations went on for six months; and we have been writing to one another for a month. I think it is very kind of me to go and look him up."

"It certainly is, but what am I going to do there? What good will I be in this reconciliation?"

"Ah, that is my business. You are young, amiable, unconventional; you suit me and will save me from the tediousness of a tete-a-tete."

"But it seems odd to me, to choose the day or the night of a reconciliation to make us acquainted; the awkwardness of the first interview, the figure all three of us will cut, – I don't see anything particularly pleasant in that."

"I have taken possession of you for my own amusement!" she said with an imperious air, "so please don't preach."

I saw she was decided, so surrendered myself to circumstances. I began to laugh at my predicament and we became exceedingly merry. We again changed horses. The mysterious torch of night lit up a sky of extreme clearness and shed around a delightful twilight. We were approaching the spot where our tete-a-tete must end. She pointed out to me at intervals the beauty of the landscape, the tranquillity of the night, the all-pervading silence of nature. In order to admire these things in company as it was natural we should, we turned to the same window and our faces touched for a moment. In a sudden shock she seized my hand, and by a chance which seemed to me extraordinary, for the stone over which our carriage had bounded could not have been very large, I found Madame de T – in my arms. I do not know what we were trying to see; what I am sure of is that the objects before our eyes began in spite of the full moon to grow misty, when suddenly I was released from her weight, and she sank into the back cushions of the carriage.

"Your object," she said, rousing herself from a deep reverie, "is possibly to convince me of the imprudence of this proceeding. Judge, therefore, of my embarrassment!"

"My object!" I replied, "what object can I have with regard to you? What a delusion! You look very far ahead; but of course the sudden surprise or turn of chance may excuse anything."

"You have counted, then, upon that chance, it seems to me?"

We had reached our destination, and before we were aware of it, we had entered the court of the chateau. The whole place was brightly lit up. Everything wore a festal air, excepting the face of its master, who at the sight of me seemed anything but delighted. He came forward and expressed in somewhat hesitating terms the tenderness proper to the occasion of a reconciliation. I understood later on that this reconciliation was absolutely necessary from family reasons. I was presented to him and was coldly greeted. He extended his hand to his wife, and I followed the two, thinking of my part in the past, in the present and in the future. I passed through apartments decorated with exquisite taste. The master in this respect had gone beyond all the ordinary refinement of luxury, in the hope of reanimating, by the influence of voluptuous imagery, a physical nature that was dead. Not knowing what to say, I took refuge in expressions of admiration. The goddess of the temple, who was quite ready to do the honors, accepted my compliments.

"You have not seen anything," she said. "I must take you to the apartments of my husband."

"Madame, five years ago I caused them to be pulled down."

"Oh! Indeed!" said she.

At the dinner, what must she do but offer the master some fish, on which he said to her:

"Madame, I have been living on milk for the last three years."

"Oh! Indeed!" she said again.

Can any one imagine three human beings as astonished as we were to find ourselves gathered together? The husband looked at me with a supercilious air, and I paid him back with a look of audacity.

Madame de T – smiled at me and was charming to me; Monsieur de T – accepted me as a necessary evil. Never in all my life have I taken part in a dinner which was so odd as that. The dinner ended, I thought that we would go to bed early – that is, I thought that Monsieur de T – would. As we entered the drawing-room:

"I appreciate, madame," said he, "your precaution in bringing this gentleman with you. You judged rightly that I should be but poor company for the evening, and you have done well, for I am going to retire."

Then turning to me, he added in a tone of profound sarcasm:

"You will please to pardon me, and obtain also pardon from madame."

He left us. My reflections? Well, the reflections of a twelvemonth were then comprised in those of a minute. When we were left alone, Madame de T – and I, we looked at each other so curiously that, in order to break through the awkwardness, she proposed that we should take a turn on the terrace while we waited, as she said, until the servants had supped.

It was a superb night. It was scarcely possible to discern surrounding objects, they seemed to be covered with a veil, that imagination might be permitted to take a loftier flight. The gardens, terraced on the side of a mountain, sloped down, platform after platform, to the banks of the Seine, and the eye took in the many windings of the stream covered with islets green and picturesque. These variations in the landscape made up a thousand pictures which gave to the spot, naturally charming, a thousand novel features. We walked along the most extensive of these terraces, which was covered with a thick umbrage of trees. She had recovered from the effects of her husband's persiflage, and as we walked along she gave me her confidence. Confidence begets confidence, and as I told her mine, all she said to me became more intimate and more interesting. Madame de T – at first gave me her arm; but soon this arm became interlaced in mine, I know not how, but in some way almost lifted her up and prevented her from touching the ground. The position was agreeable, but became at last fatiguing. We had been walking for a long time and we still had much to say to each other. A bank of turf appeared and she sat down without withdrawing her arm. And in this position we began to sound the praises of mutual confidence, its charms and its delights.

"Ah!" she said to me, "who can enjoy it more than we and with less cause of fear? I know well the tie that binds you to another, and therefore have nothing to fear."

Perhaps she wished to be contradicted. But I answered not a word. We were then mutually persuaded that it was possible for us to be friends without fear of going further.

"But I was afraid, however," I said, "that that sudden jolt in the carriage and the surprising consequences may have frightened you."

"Oh, I am not so easily alarmed!"

"I fear it has left a little cloud on your mind?"

"What must I do to reassure you?"

"Give me the kiss here which chance – "

"I will gladly do so; for if I do not, your vanity will lead you to think that I fear you."

I took the kiss.

It is with kisses as with confidences, the first leads to another. They are multiplied, they interrupt conversation, they take its place; they scarce leave time for a sigh to escape. Silence followed. We could hear it, for silence may be heard. We rose without a word and began to walk again.

"We must go in," said she, "for the air of the river is icy, and it is not worth while – "

"I think to go in would be more dangerous," I answered.

"Perhaps so! Never mind, we will go in."

"Why, is this out of consideration for me? You wish doubtless to save me from the impressions which I may receive from such a walk as this – the consequences which may result. Is it for me – for me only – ?"

"You are modest," she said smiling, "and you credit me with singular consideration."

"Do you think so? Well, since you take it in this way, we will go in;

I demand it."

A stupid proposition, when made by two people who are forcing themselves to say something utterly different from what they think.

Then she compelled me to take the path that led back to the chateau. I do not know, at least I did not then know, whether this course was one which she forced upon herself, whether it was the result of a vigorous resolution, or whether she shared my disappointment in seeing an incident which had begun so well thus suddenly brought to a close but by a mutual instinct our steps slackened and we pursued our way gloomily dissatisfied the one with the other and with ourselves. We knew not the why and the wherefore of what we were doing. Neither of us had the right to demand or even to ask anything. We had neither of us any ground for uttering a reproach. O that we had got up a quarrel! But how could I pick one with her? Meanwhile we drew nearer and nearer, thinking how we might evade the duty which we had so awkwardly imposed upon ourselves. We reached the door, when Madame de T – said to me:

"I am angry with you! After the confidences I have given you, not to give me a single one! You have not said a word about the countess. And yet it is so delightful to speak of the one we love! I should have listened with such interest! It was the very best I could do after I had taken you away from her!"

"Cannot I reproach you with the same thing?" I said, interrupting her, "and if instead of making me a witness to this singular reconciliation in which I play so odd a part, you had spoken to me of the marquis – "

"Stop," she said, "little as you know of women, you are aware that their confidences must be waited for, not asked. But to return to yourself. Are you very happy with my friend? Ah! I fear the contrary – "

"Why, madame, should everything that the public amuses itself by saying claim our belief?"

"You need not dissemble. The countess makes less a mystery of things than you do. Women of her stamp do not keep the secrets of their loves and of their lovers, especially when you are prompted by discretion to conceal her triumph. I am far from accusing her of coquetry; but a prude has as much vanity as a coquette. – Come, tell me frankly, have you not cause of complaint against her?"

"But, madame, the air is really too icy for us to stay here. Would you like to go in?" said I with a smile.

"Do you find it so? – That is singular. The air is quite warm."

She had taken my arm again, and we continued to walk, although I did not know the direction which we took. All that she had hinted at concerning the lover of the countess, concerning my mistress, together with this journey, the incident which took place in the carriage, our conversation on the grassy bank, the time of night, the moonlight – all made me feel anxious. I was at the same time carried along by vanity, by desire, and so distracted by thought, that I was too excited perhaps to take notice of all that I was experiencing. And, while I was overwhelmed with these mingled feelings, she continued talking to me of the countess, and my silence confirmed the truth of all that she chose to say about her. Nevertheless, certain passages in her talk recalled me to myself.

"What an exquisite creature she is!" she was saying. "How graceful! On her lips the utterances of treachery sound like witticism; an act of infidelity seems the prompting of reason, a sacrifice to propriety; while she is never reckless, she is always lovable; she is seldom tender and never sincere; amorous by nature, prudish on principle; sprightly, prudent, dexterous though utterly thoughtless, varied as Proteus in her moods, but charming as the Graces in her manner; she attracts but she eludes. What a number of parts I have seen her play! *Entre nous*, what a number of dupes hang round her! What fun she has made of the baron, what a life she has led the marquis! When she took you, it was merely for the purpose of throwing the two rivals off the scent; they were on the point of a rupture; for she had played with them too long, and they had had time to see through her. But she brought you on the scene. Their attention was called to you, she led them to redouble their pursuit, she was in despair over you, she pitied you, she consoled you – Ah! how happy is a clever woman when in such a game as this she professes to stake nothing of her own! But yet, is this true happiness?"

This last phrase, accompanied by a significant sigh, was a master-stroke. I felt as if a bandage had fallen from my eyes, without seeing who had put it there. My mistress appeared to me the falsest of women, and I believed that I held now the only sensible creature in the world. Then I sighed without knowing why. She seemed grieved at having given me pain and at having in her excitement drawn a picture, the truth of which might be open to suspicion, since it was the work of a woman. I do not know how I answered; for without realizing the drift of all I heard, I set out with her on the high road of sentiment, and we mounted to such lofty heights of feeling that it was impossible to guess what would be the end of our journey. It was fortunate that we also took the path towards a pavilion which she pointed out to me at the end of the terrace, a pavilion, the witness of many sweet moments. She described to me the furnishing of it. What a pity that she had not the key! As she spoke we reached the pavilion and found that it was open. The clearness of the moonlight outside did not penetrate, but darkness has many charms. We trembled as we went in. It was a sanctuary. Might it not be the sanctuary of love? We drew near a sofa and sat down, and there we remained a moment listening to our heart-beats. The last ray of the moon carried away the last scruple. The hand which repelled me felt my heart beat. She struggled to get away, but fell back overcome with tenderness. We talked together through that silence in the language of thought. Nothing is more rapturous than these mute conversations. Madame de T – took refuge in my arms, hid her head in my bosom, sighed and then grew calm under my caresses. She grew melancholy, she was consoled, and she asked of love all that love had robbed her of. The sound of the river broke the silence of night with a gentle murmur, which seemed in harmony with the beating of our hearts. Such was the darkness of the place it was scarcely possible to discern objects; but through the transparent crepe of a fair summer's night, the queen of that lovely place seemed to me adorable.

"Oh!" she said to me with an angelic voice, "let us leave this dangerous spot. Resistance here is beyond our strength."

She drew me away and we left the pavilion with regret.

"Ah! how happy is she!" cried Madame de T – .

"Whom do you mean?" I asked.

"Did I speak?" said she with a look of alarm.

And then we reached the grassy bank, and stopped there involuntarily. "What a distance there is," she said to me, "between this place and the pavilion!"

"Yes indeed," said I. "But must this bank be always ominous? Is there a regret? Is there – ?"

I do not know by what magic it took place; but at this point the conversation changed and became less serious. She ventured even to speak playfully of the pleasures of love, to eliminate from them all moral considerations, to reduce them to their simplest elements, and to prove that the favors of lovers were mere pleasure, that there were no pledges – philosophically speaking – excepting those which were given to the world, when we allowed it to penetrate our secrets and joined it in the acts of indiscretion.

"How mild is the night," she said, "which we have by chance picked out! Well, if there are reasons, as I suppose there are, which compel us to part to-morrow, our happiness, ignored as it is by all nature, will not leave us any ties to dissolve. There will, perhaps, be some regrets, the pleasant memory of which will give us reparation; and then there will be a mutual understanding, without all the delays, the fuss and the tyranny of legal proceedings. We are such machines – and I blush to avow it – that in place of all the shrinkings that tormented me before this scene took place, I was half inclined to embrace the boldness of these principles, and I felt already disposed to indulge in the love of liberty.

"This beautiful night," she continued, "this lovely scenery at this moment have taken on fresh charms. O let us never forget this pavilion! The chateau," she added smilingly, "contains a still more charming place, but I dare not show you anything; you are like a child, who wishes to touch everything and breaks everything that he touches."

Moved by a sentiment of curiosity I protested that I was a very good child. She changed the subject.

"This night," she said, "would be for me without a regret if I were not vexed with myself for what I said to you about the countess. Not that I wish to find fault with you. Novelty attracts me. You have found me amiable, I should like to believe in your good faith. But the dominion of habit takes a long time to break through and I have not learned the secret of doing this – By the bye, what do you think of my husband?"

"Well, he is rather cross, but I suppose he could not be otherwise to me."

"Oh, that is true, but his way of life isn't pleasant, and he could not see you here with indifference. He might be suspicious even of our friendship."

"Oh! he is so already."

"Confess that he has cause. Therefore you must not prolong this visit; he might take it amiss. As soon as any one arrives – " and she added with a smile, "some one is going to arrive – you must go. You have to keep up appearance, you know. Remember his manner when he left us to-night."

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