

VALMONT & MARQUIS SIDE 2

(Late in the play. Marquis is expecting Danceny, not Valmont. She has her back turned when he enters.)

Marquis: Is that you? You're early.

Valmont: Am I? *(beat)* I wanted to ask you: that story you told me, how did it end?

Marquis: I'm not sure I know what you mean.

Valmont: Well, once this friend of yours had taken the advice of his lady-friend, did she take him back?

Marquis: Am I to understand ... ?

Valmont: The day after our last meeting, I broke with Madame de Tourvel, on the grounds that it was beyond my control.

Marquis: You didn't!

Valmont: On my honor.

Marquis: But how wonderful of you. I never thought you'd do it.

Valmont: It seemed pointless to delay.

Marquis: With the anticipated results?

Valmont: She was prostrate when I left. I called back the following day, but she declined to receive me.

Marquis: You don't say.

Valmont: Subsequent inquiries I made established that she had withdrawn to a convent. And she's still there. A very fitting conclusion, really. It's as if she'd been widowed. *(beat)* You kept telling me my reputation was in danger, but I think this might well turn out to be my most famous exploit. I could confidently offer it as a challenge to any potential rival for my position. Only one thing could possibly bring me greater glory.

Marquis: What's that?

Valmont: To win her back.

Marquis: You think you could?

Valmont: I don't see why not.

Marquis: I'll tell you why not: because when one woman strikes at the heart of another, she seldom misses, and the wound is invariably fatal.

Valmont: Is that so?

Marquis: I'm so convinced it's so; I'm prepared to offer any odds you care to suggest against your success. You see, I'm also inclined to see this as one of my greatest triumphs.

Valmont: There's nothing a woman enjoys as much as a victory over another woman.

Marquis: Except, you see, Vicomte, my victory wasn't over her.

Valmont: Of course it was; what do you mean?

Marquis: It was over you. That's what's so amusing. That's what's so genuinely delicious.

Valmont: You don't know what you're talking about.

Marquis: You loved that woman, Vicomte. What's more, you still do. Quite desperately. If you hadn't been so ashamed of it, how could you possibly have treated her so viciously? You couldn't bear even the vague possibility of being laughed at. And this has proved something I've always suspected. That vanity and happiness are incompatible.

Valmont: Whatever may or may not be the truth of these philosophical speculations, the fact is it's now your turn to make a sacrifice.

Marquis: Is that right?

Valmont: Danceny must go.

Marquis: Where?

Valmont: I've been more than patient about this little whim of yours, but enough is enough, and I really must insist you call a halt to it.

Marquis: One of the reasons I never remarried, despite a quite bewildering range of offers, was the determination never again to be ordered around. So, I must ask you to adopt a less marital tone of voice.

Valmont: She's ill, you know. I've made her ill for your sake. The least you can do is get rid of that colorless youth.

Marquis: I should have thought you'd have had enough of bullying women for the time being.

Valmont: Right. I see I shall have to make myself very plain. I have come to spend the night. I shall not take at all kindly to being turned away.

Marquis: I am sorry. I'm afraid I've made other arrangements.

Valmont: Ah, I knew there was something. Something I had to tell you. What with one thing and another, it had slipped my mind.

Marquis: What?

Valmont: Danceny isn't coming. *(beat)* I've arranged for him to spend the night with Cecile. Come to think of it, he did mention he was expected here, but when I put it to him that he really would have to make a choice, I must say he didn't hesitate for a second. I'd even dictated a letter from Cecile to send him as insurance, but as it turned out, there wasn't any need. He knew his mind.

Marquis: And now I know yours.

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