

#5 DANCENY, Valmont & Merteuil

(DANCENY enters and hurries over to kiss MERTEUIL's hand. Then he acknowledges VALMONT.)

DANCENY. Vicomte.

VALMONT. My dear young man. How good to see you again.

(DANCENY turns back to MERTEUIL, speaks a trifle breathlessly.)

DANCENY. I'm sorry to be late, Madame.

MERTEUIL. Very nearly too late. *(But looking up at DANCENY's sincerely repentant expression, she softens.)* As you know, Mademoiselle de Volanges...

DANCENY. It gives me such pleasure to hear her name spoken, Madame.

MERTEUIL. Yes, yes, quite. As I was saying, Mademoiselle de Volanges has done me the honor of making me her confidante and counsellor in this matter which concerns you both.

DANCENY. She could hardly have chosen more wisely.

MERTEUIL. Yes, well, be that as it may, I felt very strongly that in this situation, which is exceedingly delicate, you too might find it beneficial to be able to confide in someone sympathetic, a person of experience: and the Vicomte de Valmont, who is known to you as well as being an old friend of mine and a man of unswerving discretion, seems to me an ideal choice. And should you agree, he's very kindly consented to devote himself to your interests.

(A frown crosses VALMONT's face: but by the time DANCENY, who for his part seems slightly flustered by the offer, turns to him, it's vanished.)

DANCENY. Well...

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VALMONT. Perhaps it is my reputation which is causing you to hesitate: if so, I think I can assure you that a man's own mistakes are not necessarily a guide to his faculty for objective judgement.

DANCENY. No, of course not, I certainly wouldn't have the impudence, no, it's ... the fact is, this is not a conventional intrigue with the aim of ... that's to say, my love and respect ...

VALMONT. We're not dealing, you mean, with a frivolous coquette or a bored wife?

DANCENY. Precisely. A person like Mademoiselle de Volanges must be treated with the utmost consideration. And my own position has certain weaknesses, of which I'm only too bitterly aware. Her great fortune, for example, when compared to my own precarious condition ...

VALMONT. Naturally, there would no excuse for trying to maneuver her into such a pass that she would be forced to marry you, that would be quite wrong.

DANCENY. You do understand how I feel.

MERTEUIL. Of course he does, what did I tell you?

DANCENY. You see, I'm quite happy with things as they are, as long as she consents to see me, to continue with the music lessons.

VALMONT. Ah the music lessons. In any case, I have absolutely no wish to press my attentions on you ...

DANCENY. No, please ...

VALMONT. But do rest assured that I am honored to be at your disposal.

DANCENY. The honor, Monsieur, is entirely mine, and any contact with you would be a privilege.