

#6 VOLANGES & Merteuil

VOLANGES. Your note said it was urgent...

MERTEUIL. It's days now, I haven't been able to think about anything else. I couldn't decide what to do for the best. Finally I saw there was no escaping the fact it was my plain duty to tell you. Please sit down. (*MME DE VOLANGES, now decidedly uneasy, does so, as MERTEUIL paces to and fro, looking anguished.*) As you know, in recent weeks, Cécile has been kind enough to accept my friendship and, I believe, bestow on me her own.

VOLANGES. Yes, of course, she's devoted to you.

MERTEUIL. This is what makes this duty doubly difficult to perform.

VOLANGES. This has something to do with Cécile?

MERTEUIL. I may be wrong; I pray Heaven I am. (*MERTEUIL pauses again; by now, MME DE VOLANGES is thoroughly alarmed.*)

VOLANGES. Go on. (*MERTEUIL takes a deep breath.*)

MERTEUIL. I have reason to believe that a, how can I describe it, dangerous liaison has sprung up between your daughter and the Chevalier Danceny. (*Silence. MME DE VOLANGES is dumbfounded, but it only takes a few seconds for her to recover her equilibrium.*)

VOLANGES. No, no, that's completely absurd. Cécile is still a child, she understands nothing of these things; and Danceny is an entirely respectable young man.

MERTEUIL. If you were to be right, no one would be happier than I.

VOLANGES. Naturally, they've never been together unchaperoned, generally by me and often by you.

MERTEUIL. Precisely, that's when I first formed the impression that something was passing between them: the way they looked at each other.

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VOLANGES. I'm sure it's merely their feeling for the music.

MERTEUIL. Perhaps so. But there was one other thing. Tell me, does Cécile have a great many correspondents?

VOLANGES. She writes, I suppose, an average number of letters. Relatives, friends from the convent...Why?

MERTEUIL. I went into her room at the beginning of the week, I simply knocked and entered without waiting for a reply, and she was stuffing a letter into the left-hand drawer of her bureau, in which, I couldn't help noticing, there seemed to be a large number of similar letters.
(Silence. Then MME DE VOLANGES rises to her feet.)

VOLANGES. I'm most grateful to you. I'll see myself out.

MERTEUIL. I hope you don't think me interfering.

VOLANGES. Not at all.

MERTEUIL. And I do hope, if, God forbid, you do discover anything compromising, you won't tell Cécile it was I who was responsible. I would hate to forfeit her trust, and if there is to be a period of difficulty, I would like to think my advice might be of some use to her.

VOLANGES. Of course. *(MERTEUIL rings for a servant. MME DE VOLANGES stands there, still in a state of mild shock.)*

MERTEUIL. Would you think it impertinent if I were to make another suggestion?

VOLANGES. No, no.

MERTEUIL. If my recollection is correct, I overheard you saying to the Vicomte de Valmont that his aunt had invited you to stay at her château.

VOLANGES. She has, yes, repeatedly.

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MERTEUIL. A spell in the country might be there very thing until all this blows over.

VOLANGES. If what you tell me has any truth in it, I may very well send her back to the convent.

MERTEUIL. Wouldn't it be better to threaten that as a punishment if there's any resumption of relations?

VOLANGES. Perhaps. I can't believe you're right about this.

MERTEUIL. Let's hope not.

(For a moment, MME DE VOLANGES is lost in thought; she then looks up, frowning.)

VOLANGES. Isn't the Vicomte staying there at the moment?

MERTEUIL. I understand he's returned to Paris. *(She embraces MME DE VOLANGES warmly.)* I expect I've imagined the whole thing and tomorrow we'll be able to laugh at my stupidity. If so, I hope you'll be able to forgive me.

VOLANGES. My dear, I shall always be more than grateful for your concern.