

I - RAOUL + DUKE

Meaning you can say to me whatever you would've said to her.

Pause.

RAOUL

I would like to offer her highness my profound thanks for her efforts on my behalf. I cannot, however, accept the position in the royal guard that she so generously worked to obtain for me.

Pause.

DUKE

I'm sure her highness would deny she made any efforts on your behalf.

RAOUL

I would only take this as yet another indication of the selfless nobility of her nature.

DUKE

You wouldn't take it as a sign she had nothing to do with this?

RAOUL

I might be new to Paris, but its book is not difficult to read. It would be an honor to serve in the royal guard, but they do not offer positions to young impoverished noblemen from the provinces. And it is common knowledge that General du Châtelet, current head of the royal guard, has a niece Diane-Adélaïde, whose current lover, marquis de La Fayette, used to be in a particular favor with my kind patroness, Countess de Bourbon. The connection is clear. Thus I am unable to accept the offer that is not based on my innate worthiness.

Pause.

DUKE

You're sharper than – your first impression.

RAOUL

Countries have fallen for having underestimated the Normans.

DUKE

And a quick learner.

RAOUL

I seem to inspire confidence in people.

DUKE

And those people – do they tend to possess a particular... gender?

RAOUL

I do find Parisian ladies to be particularly high-minded in conversations with me.

DUKE

Are they, now?

RAOUL

I've had, with Countess de Villeroy, and Marquisa Duras, and Madame d'Aumont, multiple, lengthy, deep intercoursés, and – are you all right, your excellency?

DUKE

Never better.

RAOUL

– and found them all to be of superior thoughts and noble ideals.

DUKE

How noble?

RAOUL

We enjoy profound discussions of spiritual nature, on topics such as honor, nobility, and selfless desires of the mind that are shared between soulmates only.

DUKE

Perhaps we speak a different dialect in Paris. I'd enjoy accompanying you on your next – intercourse – with Madame d'Aumont, so I could translate to you what she means by “selfless desires”.

RAOUL

I'm sure your excellence means kindly, for you cannot mean to imply anything but his highest respect to this lady. I'm aware that ladies in Paris have lovers. But Paris is hardly the den of iniquity we speak of in the provinces. I found the rumor that high nobility in Paris has two lovers for every confessor to be entirely incorrect. They have at least two confessors for each lover.

Pause.

DUKE

And what if you're wrong? What if Paris – and France – and humanity in general – are mean and selfish animals, governed most of all by their base desires, and caring not one whit for the others?

RAOUL

Were his excellency to make such a claim, I would be convinced he does so as a jest at the expense of a green youth, and not because his own experience was cruel enough to despoil his faith in the goodness of human heart.

DUKE

Shall we make a bet, then? A thousand louis?

RAOUL

I'm – poor.

DUKE

And I'm in debt. And of all my friends, half are tightwads, and would not loan me money, and the other half are spendthrifts, and could not loan it. So the way I make money – I make bets.

RAOUL

What do you propose?

DUKE

You and I take a walk. The first adult female we see – single, married, or widowed, of any rank, age, or appearance, would grant me an assignation within twenty-four hours.

RAOUL

Assignation?

DUKE

Shall I translate that word into French?

RAOUL

No, your meaning is clear. Any age or appearance?

DUKE

That's what makes it a challenge. If she is young and pretty, I'll have to work hard to convince her. If she's old and plain, I'll have to work hard to convince myself.

RAOUL

The first female we'll meet will be our hostess's maidservant.

DUKE

First noble-born female, then.

RAOUL

In that case, we're as likely to run into her highness herself, and you're already receiving in her name.

The Duke stares at the two halves of a broken coin on the table.

DUKE

You're right. That would be robbing you of your money. We'll exclude her.

RAOUL

If you succeed, how would you prove it?