

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

SCENE 7

The following day, 1st October. The low afternoon sun slants in through the windows of the salon in MME DE ROSEMONDE's chateau.

At first, the room is empty: then CECILE appears, arm-in-arm with MME DE MERTEUIL who seems almost to be supporting her. CECILE looks exhausted and distraught; MERTEUIL, solicitous.

MERTEUIL. My dear, I really can't help you unless you tell me what's troubling you.

CECILE. I can't, I just can't.

MERTEUIL. I thought we'd agreed not to keep any secrets from one another.

CECILE. I'm so unhappy.

(CECILE bursts into tears. MERTEUIL takes her in her arms and soothes her mechanically, her expression, as long as it's not seen by CECILE, bored and impatient.)

Everything's gone wrong since the day Maman found Danceney's letters.

MERTEUIL. Yes, that was very stupid of you. How could you have let that happen?

CECILE. Someone must have told her, she went straight to my bureau and opened the drawer I was keeping them in.

MERTEUIL. Who could have done such a thing?

CECILE. It must have been my chambermaid...

MERTEUIL. Or your confessor perhaps?

CECILE. Oh, no surely not.

MERTEUIL. You can't always trust those people, my dear.

CECILE. That's terrible.

MERTEUIL. But today, what is the matter today?

CECILE. You'll be angry with me.

MERTEUIL. Are you sure you don't want me to be angry with you?

CECILE looks up at MERTEUIL, surprised by the acuteness of this idea.)

Come along.

CECILE. I don't know how to speak the words.

MERTEUIL. Perhaps I am beginning to get angry.

(MERTEUIL has spoken quietly; and now there's a long silence. Finally, CECILE takes a deep breath.)

CECILE. Last night...

MERTEUIL. Yes.

CECILE. So that we could exchange letters to and from Danceny without arousing suspicion, I gave Monsieur de Valmont the key to my bedroom...

MERTEUIL. Yes.

CECILE. And last night he used it. I thought he'd just come to bring me a letter. But he hadn't. And by the time I realized what he had come for, it was, well, it was too late to stop him...

CECILE bursts into tears again; but this time MERTEUIL doesn't take her in her arms. Instead, she considers her coolly for a moment before speaking.)

MERTEUIL. You mean to tell me you're upset because Monsieur de Valmont has taught you something you've undoubtedly been dying to learn?

(CECILE tears are cut off and she looks up in shock.)

CECILE. What?

MERTEUIL. And am I to understand that what generally brings a girl to her senses has deprived you of yours?

CECILE. I thought you'd be horrified.

MERTEUIL. Tell me: you resisted him, did you?

CECILE. Of course I did, as much as I could.

MERTEUIL. But he forced you?

CECILE. It wasn't that exactly, but I found it almost impossible to defend myself.

MERTEUIL. Why was that? Did he tie you up?

CECILE. No, no, but he has a way of putting things, you just can't think of an answer.

MERTEUIL. Not even no?

CECILE. I kept saying no, all the time: but somehow that wasn't what I was doing. And in the end...

MERTEUIL. Yes?

CECILE. I told him he could come back tonight.

(Silence. CECILE seems, once again, trembling on the edge of tears.)

I'm so ashamed.

MERTEUIL. You'll find the shame is like the pain: you only feel it once.

CECILE. And this morning it was terrible. As soon as I saw Maman, I couldn't help it, I burst into tears.

MERTEUIL. I'm surprised you missed the opportunity to bring the whole thing to a rousing climax by confessing all. You wouldn't be worrying about tonight if you'd done that you'd be packing your bags for the convent.

CECILE. What am I going to do?

MERTEUIL. You really want my advice?

CECILE. Please.

(MERTEUIL considers a moment.)

MERTEUIL. Allow Monsieur de Velmont to continue your instruction. Convince your mother you have forgotten Danceny. And raise no objection to the marriage.

(CECILE gapes at MERTEUIL, bewildered.)

CECILE. With Monsieur de Gercourt?

MERTEUIL. When it comes to marriage one man is as good as the next; and even the least accommodating is less trouble than a mother.

CECILE. But what about Danceny?

MERTEUIL. He seems patient enough; and once you're married, you should be able to see him without undue difficulty.

CECILE. I thought you once said to me, I am sure you did, one evening at the Opera, that once I was married, I would have to be beautiful to my husband.

MERTEUIL. Your mind must have been wandering, you must have been listening to the opera.

CECILE. So, are you saying I'm going to have to do that with three different men?

MERTEUIL. I'm saying, you stupid little girl, that provided you take a few elementary precautions, you can do it, or not, with as many men as you like, as often as you like, in as many different ways as you like. Our sex has few enough advantages, you may as well make the most of those you have. Now here comes your mama, so remember what I've said and, above all, no more sniveling.

CECILE. Yes, Madame.