

FIRST LADY (MRS. SEGSTROM) Tell me something about this remarkable Countess, Madame.

SECOND LADY (MRS. ANDERSSSEN) I shall try as best I can to depict the personality of the Countess, Madame, although it is too rich in mysterious contradictions to be described in a few short moments.

FIRST LADY (MRS. SEGSTROM) It is said that her power over men is most extraordinary.

SECOND LADY (MRS. ANDERSSSEN) There is a great deal of truth in that, Madame, and her lovers are as many as the pearls in the necklace which she always wears.

FIRST LADY (MRS. SEGSTROM) Your own husband, Madame, is supposed to be one of the handsomest pearls, is he not?

SECOND LADY (MRS. ANDERSSSEN) He fell in love with the Countess on sight. She took him as a lover for three months and after that I had him back.

FIRST LADY (MRS. SEGSTROM) And your marriage was crushed?

SECOND LADY (MRS. ANDERSSSEN) On the contrary, Madame! My husband had become a tender, devoted, admirable lover, a faithful husband and an exemplary father. The Countess's lack of decency is most moral.

DESIREE (*To SECOND LADY*) Dear Madame Merville, what a charming mischance to find you here this evening.

SECOND LADY (MRS. ANDERSSSEN) Charming, indeed, dear Celimène. May I be permitted to present my school friend from the provinces? Madame Vilmorac—whose husband, I'm sure, is in dire need of a little expert polishing.

FIRST LADY (MRS. SEGSTROM) Oh, dear Countess, you are all but a legend to me. I implore you to reveal to me the secret of your success with the hardier sex!

DESIREE Dear Madame, that can be summed up in a single word—

DESIREE —dignity.

TWO LADIES Dignity?

DESIREE Dignity. We women have a right to commit any crime toward our husbands, our lovers, our sons, as long as we do not hurt their dignity. We should make men's dignity our best ally and caress it, cradle it, speak tenderly to it, and handle it as our most delightful toy. Then a man is in our hands, at our feet, or anywhere else we momentarily wish him to be.