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Time, as they often say, certainly flies. Three years have elapsed since my marriage with Fay. Based on this short communal life, I must admit that I count among the happiest men in the world. In addition, I see no indication that I won't keep on enjoying this family joyfulness throughout my existence.

Undoubtedly, I met with my wife, the first time, under extremely trying circumstances, which allowed us to notice that we did have many affinities between us: concern for others, irresistible optimism and genuine love for transcendent values. Material possession has never obsessed us.

I think these positive elements of our philosophy of life have laid the foundations of our harmonization that has never waned, to my knowledge.

However, as for me, even if we didn't meet under special circumstances, Fay would remain *my choice*. She happens to embody the *ideal womanhood*. Why would I think this way? I may never decipher this puzzle, because its roots may plunge into my tendencies and a great deal of imponderables defying the most advanced scientific inquiries.

I only assume that my departed father's influence on me has something to do with it.

Antoine Archange Raphael

Remembering how he has formed my *concept of womanhood* and a host of other beliefs tells me how close we had used to live before he died. I also feel certain regret for not having him around to guide me with his natural wisdom.

His “lecture” on “ideal womanhood” turns now so vivid in my mind that I sense his presence.

On a clear Saturday, my mother, along with some close female friends and relatives, went shopping on Jamaica Avenue, in Queen, one of the New York Boroughs.

Going to that commercial area on the first day of weekend had the complexion of some kind of ritual they would not miss for anything in the world (despite the crowd of prospective buyers bumping against each other).

Those *women* kept Sundays for church activities and family gatherings.

They often took their daughters along to initiate them early to this *kind consumerist habit* and to exhilarating fun: eating at MacDonald, Burger King, and other fast-food restaurants (not to mention the cheese shops).

Apparently, the cheerful way they carried themselves, indicated that they had the time of their life.

On that particular Saturday, my father seized the opportunity to have a “man to man” conversation with me.

We sat on the sofa side by side.

Harmony and contrast (the female impact), Book II

We had intended to watch the football game on our fifty-six foot inch TV set, but he changed his mind.

His pieces of advice, that day, took precedence over anything else.

In a deep but melodious tone, he “pictured” the type of wife he would like me to have, as well as the kind of man he hoped for me to become.

“Peter, listen to me good,” he started in a voice that seemed to indicate that he had a premonition about his imminent death. “I adore your mother, and what I will tell you, in her absence, comes from the bottom of my heart.

“I know that the world keeps changing at a rapid pace, to such a par that we get the feeling of racing constantly against time. Anyway, it looks this way.

“All happens very quickly through the Internet or by computer. Similarly, women more and more have turned as much educated as men and aspired to high positions in the administration and private industries.

“Yet their evolution in the fabric of history shouldn’t alarm men. It should rather appease them.

“Families may become stronger, more independent of the hazards of existence, the more so as one check may barely satisfy family primary needs, with the galloping cost of leaving increase throughout this world.

“I remember the time I could buy groceries with twenty dollars and return home with bags of food. Today, sixty dollars can barely satisfy our basic needs.

Antoine Archange Raphael

“That’s not all.

“We must meet an increasing number of other obligations created by modern living.

“Therefore, let me suggest the following: you shouldn’t marry a woman for show, for her beautiful and proportionate legs, for her dove eyes, angelic smile, and her powerful mind astonishing the world.

“Of course, she will glow with beauty and charm (he giggled). In fact, and many men would agree with me, I wonder if Nature or God, in these days, don’t make all women beautiful.

“For some unexplained reason, wherever I go, I see nothing but angelic creatures (he giggled again).

“Anyway, my dear son, you shouldn’t mix her up with an object of display; not at all. In my humble opinion, you should look for someone you love, someone you would like to stay with, in the intimacy of your house.

“Think about it, your children, some point in time, will leave you; your friends and relatives will grow old, will hardly stay closer to you and move around as much as they can.

“Thus, your wife must make your dream a reality; she must share your bed, your goods, your moments of sadness, your instants of joy, until you grow old and die.

“Life seems funny and aimless. It only looks like a journey that will end up in total darkness.

Harmony and contrast (the female impact), Book II

“We wish it could go on forever, but I have just expressed an impossible dream. All of us have to make this eternal journey. It is an irreversible law.

“Yet, when the family story goes according to the pattern I have just described, we may talk about a ‘happy ending’.

“Your wife must turn into a source of joy to you and give you the impression that you play the role of the captain of the ship, although, between us, we know she is the real chief.

“You must also consent to sacrifice yourself for her, but she must deserve your total commitment.

“She must embody a sweet person, which I take for a plus.

“She can’t be obnoxious, snappish and fussy.

“I do believe that a man’s home should represent his castle, not a hellish prison.

“If she gets home before you, she shouldn’t hesitate to start dinner, as you would return the favor in case you should get home ahead of her.

“Do you understand me?

“Some of *modern* women, becoming ‘financial partners’, want to share responsibilities on a fifty-fifty basis, no matter what. In reality, they spend all their time remonstrating and making certain that both parties respect this equal partnership.

“You don’t need such women; they will make you miserable and cranky.

Antoine Archange Raphael

“When you reach home, your wife should welcome you with a warm kiss, a gentle hug, a sweet word, anything that makes you forget the rough time you might have experienced on the job; and vice versa.

“This seems very important. As a professional (and I am speaking from experience), you will have to deal with lots of rude people, who curse for no reason, who yell at you, who sometimes turn ungrateful to you, to such a par that you may believe that God has sent them to test your patience.

“You may help a fellow one today and you say hello to him tomorrow, he looks at you as if you have lost your marbles. You will be happy if he asks, “Do I know you?” They firmly believe that they practice the business of receiving, not of giving. They don’t always know the meaning of respect for others, since they don’t have self-respect—to start with. Yet, you can’t afford to reciprocate in kind. No, Pete, you can’t.

“Many corporations expect you to behave like someone the public can look up to, as a teacher of good manners; otherwise, they won’t need you.

“Supposedly, a professional must behave in a calm, understanding, and compromising fashion.

“Yet, he is also a human being and would also like to enjoy a kind treatment from others.

“Where else can he receive such *humane* treatment that he lavishly gives others?

“He, certainly, can receive it at home.

Harmony and contrast (the female impact), Book II

“Without the feminine sweetness your mother showers me with, life would turn so miserable to me.

“Yet, I don’t want you to believe that I have alluded to a one-way situation, in which the wife only has the duty to please and shower sweetness.

“You, too, as a man, must try to make her happy.

“For one thing, she can’t fill you with sweetness if you push her away roughly; if you make her feel useless, unneeded.

“Therefore, even if you experienced a rotten day on the job, even if you thought that life did not worth a penny, you should never ignore the lips that greet you; you should never push back the hands thrown round your neck; you should never ignore the smile that her face shines with.

“These precious lips, these velvety hands and this angelic face could represent your last resorts, the only true human and civilized manifestations you may experience for the entire day.

“You should never believe that household duties fall upon your wife’s shoulders by right, as if the marriage contract leads straight to slavery.

“No, you haven’t bought a slave; you have conquered the heart of a lovely woman.

“The traditional belief in female domestic duties comes from an outmoded conception of social intercourse.

“In these days, men take care of children, do the laundry and the cleaning, and cook food.

Antoine Archange Raphael

“Actually, the best chefs happen to be men.

“If you don’t know how to cook, then get some training; buy a cookbook on the quiet and surprise your wife with some fancy dishes.

“Believe me, Pete. She will love that.

“As a matter of fact, I have a better idea. Occasionally, spend some time with my sister, your aunt Emma.

“She works as a gastronomist and a chef in one of the finest hotel restaurants.

“When your wife comes back home, give her a warm welcome: a kiss, a hug, a box of candies, a little gift—or whatever. Always let her get the impression of receiving from you a princess treatment in her own house, of occupying an important spot in your heart, of always keeping her status as a revered and admired person...

“Those exchanges of sweetness, kindness and mutual assistance, these family positive habits, as the marital existence strengthens with time, will grow more and more natural, normal, almost like reflexes.

“I have just touched on the secret of good marriages.

“These last forever and which keep couples of eighty years of age going hand in hand, a broad smile on the face, as if they overcome the contingencies of existence...”