

*XLVI – Why Inconstancy Is Not Injustice*

It was too kind of you, Marquis, to have noticed my absence. If I did not write you during my sojourn in the country, it was because I knew you were happy, and that tranquilized me. I felt too, that it was necessary for love to be accorded some rights, as its reign is usually very short, and besides that, friendship not having any quarrel with love, I waited patiently for an interval in your pleasure which would enable you to read my letters.

Do you know what I was doing while away? I amused myself by piecing out all the events liable to happen, in the condition your society is now in. I foresaw the bickerings between the Countess and her rival, and I predicted they would end in an open rupture; I also guessed that the Marquise would not espouse the cause of the Countess, but would take up the other's quarrel. The moneyed woman is not quite so handsome as her rival, a decisive reason for declaring for her, and backing her up without danger.

What will be the upshot of all this quarrelling among these women? How many revolutions, Good Heavens! in so short a time! Your happiness seems to be the only thing that has escaped.

You discover new reasons every day for loving and esteeming this amiable Countess. You believe that a woman of so much real merit, and with so interesting a figure, will become known more and more. Let nothing weaken the esteem you have always had for her. You have, it is true, obtained an avowal of her love for you, but is she less estimable for that? On the contrary, ought not her heart to augment in price, in your eyes, in proportion to the certainty you have acquired that you are its sole possessor? Even if you shall have obtained proofs of her inclination we spoke about recently, do

you think that gives you any right to underrate her?

I cannot avoid saying it: men like you arouse my indignation every time they imagine they claim the right to lack in courtesy for my sex, and punish us for our weaknesses. Is it not the height of injustice and the depth of depravity to continue to insult the grief, which is the cause of their changes? Cannot women be inconstant, without being unjust? Is their distaste always to be followed by some injurious act? If we are guilty, is it the right of him who has profited by our faults, who is the cause of them, to punish us?

Always maintain for the Countess the sentiments you have expressed in her regard. Do not permit a false opinion to interfere with the progress that they can still make in your heart. It is not our defeat alone that should render us despicable in your eyes. The manner in which we have been defended, delivered, and guarded, ought to be the only measure of your disdain.

So Madame de La Fayette is of the opinion that my last letter is based upon rather a liberal foundation? You see where your indiscretions lead me. But she does not consider that I am no more guilty than a demonstrator of anatomy. I analyze the metaphysical man, as he dissects the physical one. Do you believe, that out of regard to scruples, he should omit in his operations those portions of his subject which might offer corrupted minds occasions to draw sallies out of an ill regulated imagination? It is not the essence of things that causes indecency? It is not the words, or even the ideas; it is the intent of him who utters them, and the depravity of him who listens. Madame de La Fayette was certainly the last woman in the world whom I would have suspected of reproaching me in that manner, and tomorrow, at the Countess', I will make her confess her injustice.