

*XXXIV – Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder*

All this, Marquis, begins to pass the bounds of pleasantry. Explain yourself, I pray you. Did you pretend to speak seriously in your letter, in making it understood that I was acting on this occasion through jealousy, and that I was trying to separate you and the Countess to profit by it myself?

You are either the wickedest of men, or the most adroit; the wickedest if you ever could suspect me guilty of such baseness; the most adroit, if you have thrown out that idea to make my friend suspect me. I see very clearly in all this, that the alternative is equally injurious to me, since the Countess has taken the matter to heart. I find that my relations with her are very embarrassing. Criminal that you are, how well you know your ascendancy over her heart! You could not better attack her than by the appearance of indifference you affect. Not deign to answer my last letter, not come to the rendezvous given you, remain away from us three days, and after all that, to write us the coldest letter possible. Oh, I confess it frankly, that is to act like a perfect man; that is what I call a masterstroke, and the most complete success has responded to your hope. The Countess has not been able to stand against so much coolness. The fear that this indifference may become real has caused her a mortal anxiety.

Great Heavens! What is the most reasonable woman, when love has turned her head?

Why were you not the witness of the reproaches I have just heard? How is that? To hear the Countess today, gave me an injurious opinion of her virtue, a false idea of your pretensions, and I considered your designs criminal because you took so much pleasure in punishing her.

I am hard, unjust, and cruel. I cannot remember all the epithets with which I was covered. What outbursts! Oh, I protest to you, this will be the last storm I will undergo for being mixed up in your affairs, and I very cordially renounce the confidence with which you have both honored me. Advisers do not play a very agreeable part in such cases, so it seems to me, always charged with what is disagreeable in quarrels, and the lovers only profit by a reconciliation.

However, after due reflection, I think I should be very silly to take offence at this. You are two children whose follies will amuse me. I ought to look upon them with the eye of a philosopher, and finish by being the friend of both. Come then, at once, and assure me if that resolution will suit you. Now, do not play the petty cruel rôle any more. Come and make peace. These poor children: one of them has such innocent motives, the other is so sure of her virtue, that to stand in the way of their inclination, is surely to afflict them without reason.