

*XLIX – Constancy Is a Virtue Among the Narrow Minded*

You did not then know, Marquis, that it is often more difficult to get rid of a mistress than to acquire one? You are learning by experience. Your disgust for the moneyed woman does not surprise me, except that it did not happen sooner.

What! knowing her character so well, you could imagine that the despair she pretended at the sight of your indifference increasing every day, could be the effect of a veritable passion? You could also be the dupe of her management! I admire, and I pity your blindness.

But was it not also vanity, which aided a trifle in fortifying your illusion? In truth it would be a strange sort of vanity, that of being loved by such a woman; but men are so vain that they are flattered by the love of the most confirmed courtesan. In any case, undeceive yourself. A woman who is deserted, when she is a woman like your beauty, has nothing in view in her sorrow but her own interest. She endeavors by her tears and her despair, to persuade you that your person and your merit are all she regrets, that the loss of your heart is the summit of misfortune, that she knows nobody who can indemnify her for the loss of it. All these sentiments are false. It is not an afflicted lover who speaks; it is a vain woman, desperate at being anticipated, exasperated at the lack of power in her charms, worrying over a plan to replace you promptly, anxious to give herself an appearance of sensibility, and to appear worthy of a better fate. She justifies this thought of Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, "Women do not shed tears over the lovers they have had, so much because they loved them, as to appear more worthy of being loved." It is for D --- to enjoy the sentiment.

She must indeed have a very singular idea of you, to hope that she can impose upon you. Do you wish to know what she is? The Chevalier is actually without an affair of the heart on hand; engage him to take your place. I have not received two letters from you that do not speak of the facility with which she will be con-

soled for having lost you. A woman of her age begins to fear that she will not recover what she has lost, and so she is obliged to degrade her charms, by taking the first new comer. Perhaps her sorrow is true, but she deceives you as to the motives she gives for it. Break these chains without scruple. In priding yourself on your constancy and delicacy for such an object, you appear to me to be as ridiculous as you were, when you lacked the same qualities on another occasion.

Do you remember, Marquis, what Monsieur de Coulanges said to us one day? "Constancy is the virtue of people of limited merit. Have they profited by the caprice of an amiable woman to establish themselves in her heart? The sentiment of mediocrity fixes them there, it intimidates them; they dare not make an effort to please others. Too happy at having surprised her heart, they are afraid of abandoning a good that they may not find elsewhere, and, as an instant's attention to their little worth might undeceive this woman, what do they then do? They elevate constancy up among the virtues; they transform love into a superstition; they know how to interest reason in the preservation of a heart, which they owe only to caprice, occasion, or surprise." Be on your guard against imitating these shallow personages. Hearts are the money of gallantry; amiable people are the assets of society, whose destiny is to circulate in it and make many happy. A constant man is therefore as guilty as a miser who impedes the circulation in commerce. He possesses a treasure, which he does not utilize, and of which there are so many who would make good use of it.

What sort of a mistress is that who is retained by force of reason? What language reigns in her society, what violence must one not employ to say there is love when it has ceased to exist? It is seldom that passion ceases in both parties at the same time, and then constancy is a veritable tyrant; I compare it to the tyrant of

antiquity who put people to death by tying them to dead bodies. Constancy condemns us to the same punishment. Discard such a baleful precedent to the liberty of association.

Believe me, follow your tastes for the court lady you mentioned; she may weary you at times, it is true, but at least she will not degrade you. If, as you say, she is as little intelligent as she is beautiful, her reign will soon be over. Your place in her heart will soon be vacant, and I do not doubt that another, or even several other gallantries will follow yours. Perhaps you will not wait for the end, for I see by your letter that you are becoming a man of fashion. The new system you have adopted makes it certain; nothing can be better arranged. Never finish one affair without having commenced another; never withdraw from the first, except in proportion as the second one progresses. Nothing can be better, but in spite of such wise precautions, you may find yourself destitute of any,

as, for example, some event beyond the reach of human foresight may interfere with these arrangements, may have for principle always to finish with all the mistresses at once, before enabling you to find any one to keep you busy during the interregnum. I feel free to confess, Marquis, that such an arrangement is as prudent as can be imagined, and I do not doubt that you will be well pleased with a plan so wisely conceived. Adieu.

I do not know where I obtain the courage to write you such long and foolish letters. I find a secret charm in entertaining you, which I should suspect if I did not know my heart so well. I have been reflecting that it is now without any affair, and I must henceforth be on my guard against you, for you have very often thought proper to say very tender things to me, and I might think proper to believe in their sincerity.