

After the letter had been sent to Mme la Dauphine, M. de Clèves and M. de Nemours left and Mme de Clèves remained alone. As soon as she was no longer sustained by the joy of being with a person one loves, she awoke as from a dream. She contemplated with astonishment the immense difference between the way she had felt the previous evening and the way she felt now. She recalled the cold and bitter manner she had adopted with M. de Nemours while she had believed that Mme de Thémynes's letter was addressed to him; how calm and gentle her manner had been, by contrast, as soon as he had persuaded her that the letter had nothing to do with him! When she reflected that, the previous day, she had reproached herself, as if it were a crime, because she had let him see was touched by an emotion that might have been no more than pity, whereas her display of bitterness had shown him feelings of jealousy that were a certain proof of passion, she could scarcely recognize herself. Again, when it came to her that M. de Nemours, who was perfectly well aware that she knew he loved her, had seen that this made her treat him none the worse, even in her husband's presence—that, on the contrary, she had never looked on him so favourably; when she remembered that it was at her own bidding that M. de Clèves had sent for him and that they had just passed the afternoon together in private; when she reflected on all this, she concluded that she was in league with M. de Nemours and that she was deceiving the husband who least of all deserved to be deceived. She felt ashamed to appear, even in the eyes of her lover, so unworthy of esteem. But what was more intolerable to her than anything was the memory of the state in which she had passed the night, the dreadful pain she had suffered at the thought that M. de Nemours was in love with another woman and that he was unfaithful to her.

She had been ignorant until then of the deadly torments that spring from distrust and jealousy. She had thought only of preventing herself from falling in love with M. de Nemours and she had not yet begun to fear that he might love someone else. Although the suspicions the letter had given her had been set at rest, they none the less opened her eyes to the risk of being deceived and gave her intimations of distrust and jealousy that she had never known before. She was astonished never to have thought how unlikely it was that a man like M. de Nemours, who had always displayed such a superficial attitude towards women, was capable of a sincere, lasting attachment. She felt that it was almost impossible for her to find happiness in his love. But even if I could, she said to herself, what can I want with it? Do I really want to tolerate it? respond to it? Am I ready to embark on a love affair? to be unfaithful to M. de Clèves? to be unfaithful to myself? Do I wish to expose myself to the cruel remorse and mortal sufferings that love gives rise to? I am conquered and overcome by an inclination that carries me with it in spite of myself. All my resolutions are of no avail; my thoughts yesterday were no different from what I think today, yet

36 today I do the very opposite of what I decided yesterday. I must tear myself away from M. de Nemours's presence; I must go to the country, however strange my journey may appear; and if M. de Clèves persists in preventing it or wanting to know the reasons for it, perhaps I shall give him, and myself, the pain of telling him. She remained firm in this resolution and spent the evening at home without going to find out from Mme la Dauphine what the effect of the false letter had been.

Madame de Lafayette, *The Princesse de Clèves*, ed. and tr. Terence Cave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 90–92.