

*VIII – Love Banishes Old Age**Saint-Evremond to Ninon de l'Enclos:*

Your life, my well beloved, has been too illustrious not to be lived in the same manner until the end. Do not permit M. de la Rochefoucauld's "hell" to frighten you; it was a devised hell he desired to construct into a maxim. Pronounce the word "love" boldly, and that of "old age" will never pass your lips.

There is so much spirit in your letters, that you do not leave me even to imagine a decline of life in you. What ingratitude to be ashamed to mention love, to which we owe all our merit, all our pleasures! For, my lovely keeper of the casket, the reputation of your probity is established particularly upon the fact that you have resisted lovers, who would willingly have made free with the money of their friends.

Confess all your passions to make your virtues of greater worth; however, you do not expose but the one-half of your character; there is nothing better than what regards your friends, nothing more unsatisfactory than what you have bestowed upon your lovers.

In a few verses, I will draw your entire character. Here they are, giving you the qualities you now have, and those you have had:

Dans vos amours on vous trouvait légère,
 En amitié toujours sure et sincère;
 Pour vos amants, les humeurs de Vénus,
 Pour vos arms les solides vertus:
 Quand les premiers vous nommaient
 infidèle,
 Et qu'asservis encore à votre loi,
 Ils reprochaient une flamme nouvelle,
 Les autres se louaient de votre bonne foi.
 Tantôt c'était le naturel d' Hélène,
 Ses appétits comme tous ses appas;
 Tantôt c'était la probité romaine?
 C'était d'honneur la règle et le compas.
 Dans un couvent en soeur dépositaire,
 Vous auriez bien ménagé quelque affaire,

Et dans le monde à garder les dépôts,
 On vous eût justement préférée aux dévots.

(In your love affairs you were never severe,
 But your friendship was always sure and
 sincere;

The humors of Venus for those who
 desired,

For your friends, in your heart, solid vir-
 tues conspired;

When the first, infidelity laid at your door,
 Though not yet exempt from the law of
 your will,

And every new flame never failed to
 deplore,

The others rejoiced that you trusted them
 still.

Ingenuous Helen was sometimes your rôle,
 With her appetites, charms, and all else
 beside;

Sometimes Roman probity wielded your
 soul,

In honor becoming your rule and your
 guide.

And though in a convent as guardian nun,
 You might have well managed some
 sprightly fun,

In the world, as a keeper of treasures
 untold,

Preferred you would be to a lamb of the
 fold.)

Here is a little variety, which I trust will not
 surprise you:

L'indulgente et sage Nature
 A formé l'âme de Ninon
 De la volupté d'Epicure
 Et de la vertu de Caton.