

*I – A Hazardous Undertaking*

What, I, Marquis, take charge of your education, be your guide in the enterprise upon which you are about to enter? You exact too much of my friendship for you. You ought to be aware of the fact, that when a woman has lost the freshness of her first youth, and takes a special interest in a young man, everybody says she desires to “make a worldling of him.” You know the malignity of this expression. I do not care to expose myself to its application. All the service I am willing to render you, is to become your confidante. You will tell me your troubles, and I will tell you what is in my mind, likewise aid you to know your own heart and that of women.

It grieves me to say, that whatever pleasure I may expect to find in this correspondence, I cannot conceal the difficulties I am liable to encounter. The human heart, which will be the subject of my letters, presents so many contrasts that whoever lays it bare must fall into a flood of contradictions. You think you have something stable in your grasp, but find you have seized a shadow. It is indeed a chameleon, which, viewed from different aspects, presents a variety of opposite colors, and even they are constantly shifting. You may expect to read many strange things in what I shall say upon this subject. I will, however, give you my ideas, though they may often seem strange; however, that shall be for you to determine. I confess that I am not free from grave scruples of conscience, foreseeing that I can scarcely be sincere without slandering my own sex a little. But at least you will

know my views on the subject of love, and particularly everything that relates to it, and I have sufficient courage to talk to you frankly upon the subject.

I am to dine tonight with the Marquis de la Rochefoucauld. Madame de la Sablière and La Fontaine will also be guests. If it please you to be one of us, La Fontaine will regale you with two new stories, which, I am told, do not disparage his former ones. Come Marquis – But, again a scruple. Have I nothing to fear in the undertaking we contemplate? Love is so malicious and fickle! Still, when I examine my heart, I do not feel any apprehension for myself, it being occupied elsewhere, and the sentiments I possess toward you resemble love less than friendship. If the worst should happen, and I lose my head some day, we shall know how to withdraw in the easiest possible manner.

We are going to take a course of morals together. Yes, sir, MORALS! But do not be alarmed at the mere word, for there will be between us only the question of gallantry to discuss, and that, you know, sways morals to so high a degree that it deserves to be the subject of a special study. The very idea of such a project is to me infinitely risible. However, if I talk reason to you too often, will you not grow weary? This is my sole anxiety, for you well know that I am a pitiless reasoner when I wish to be. With any other heart than that which you misunderstand, I could be a philosopher such as the world never knew.

Adieu, I await your good pleasure.