

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

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Publication date: March 7, 2026

### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

### **Source Text**

Original work: Dangerous Connections, v. 1, 2, 3, 4

Author: Choderlos de Laclos

English Translation: Thomas Moore

Source: Project Gutenberg

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Choderlos de Laclos, *Dangerous Connections* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Letter 1

Cecilia Volanges to Sophia Carnay

You see, my dear friend, that I have kept my promise. Even now, with all these new things around me, I still find time to write to you. In only one day I have seen more dresses, ribbons, hats, and little pretty objects than in all the four years we spent together in the convent. I almost laugh when I think of it. If Tanville could see me now, she would be angry with envy. You remember how proud she always was when she came to see us in her fine clothes. I think I shall enjoy showing myself to her one day.

My life is very different now. Mamma asks my opinion about many things. She does not speak to me as if I were still a girl in school. I have my own maid. I have my own room and a little closet. I even have a pretty writing desk, and I keep the key myself. I can lock up my letters and my little private things, and no one touches them. This makes me feel almost like a grown woman. Mamma has told me that every morning I must come to her room when she is getting ready. She says that, before dinner, it is enough if my hair is dressed, because we are alone then. Later, in the evening, she tells me at what hour I must return to her apartment. All the rest of the day is mine.

I still have my harpsichord, my drawings, and my books, just as I had in the convent. But there is one great difference: here there is no abbess to scold me if I am lazy. I may work or I may do nothing, if I please. Still, since you are not here, my dear Sophy, I do not care much for idleness. In the convent, we talked, we laughed, we watched everyone, and even our silence was shared. Here, when I am alone, the hours feel longer. So I sit down with my music or my books, and in that way I pass the time.

At this moment it is not yet five o'clock, and I am not to go to Mamma until seven. It seems a very long time. I would gladly tell you some great secret, but nothing important has yet been said to me. And still, I cannot help thinking that something serious is near. There are so many women busy about me, so many new clothes being made, so much care taken with my appearance, that if I did not see all this, I would almost think they had forgotten that I am to be married. Perhaps it was only old Josephine's foolish talk. But then I remember that Mamma always said a young girl should stay in a convent until the time of her marriage. Now she has brought me home. That makes me think Josephine may have spoken the truth.

Ah! A carriage has just stopped at the door. I heard it clearly. And now my maid tells me Mamma has sent for me. My heart is beating so fast that I can hardly hold my pen. Could it be he? Could it be the man I am to marry? I asked my maid if she knew who had come. She laughed and said, "It is Mr. C——." I am sure that must be him. I am not dressed. I am all in confusion. I must go at once. I shall come back and tell you everything. Adieu for a moment, my dear Sophy.

I have returned, and now you may laugh at me as much as you please. I deserve it. I am so ashamed that my face grows hot again while I write. But I swear to you that you would have been deceived too.

When I entered Mamma's room, I saw a gentleman standing near her. He was dressed in black and looked serious. I made my little bow as well as I could, and then I stood still, not knowing what to do. Of course I looked at him very closely from head to foot. He seemed to be looking at me too. Then he said to Mamma, "Madam, this is a most charming young lady, and I am very sensible of your goodness."

At those words I thought my knees would give way. Such a speech, said in that tone, seemed to me so clear, so direct, that I believed all at once that this was the man chosen for me. I felt the blood rush to my face. I sat down quickly in a chair because I thought I would fall. Then, before I could understand anything, the gentleman was on his knees before me.

Sophy, what a moment! My head turned. My thoughts ran in every direction at once. I saw marriage, visits, new duties, a husband, a strange life, all together, and

I did not know where to look or how to answer. Then I gave a little cry and jumped up with such fright that Mamma burst out laughing.

“Well,” she said, “what is the matter with you? Sit down, and give Mr. —— your foot.”

My foot! Then I understood everything.

That gentleman, my terrible future husband, was only my shoemaker.

You can imagine how foolish I felt. He had come to measure me for shoes. That was all. And I, poor simple creature, had made a whole marriage out of it in my head in less than a minute. Happily no one was there except Mamma. If another person had seen me, I do not think I could ever have held up my head again. Mamma laughed a great deal, and I could not even be angry with her, because I knew I had truly behaved like a child.

Still, I have made one firm resolution: when I am married, this man shall no longer make my shoes. I cannot bear the thought of seeing him again on his knees before me. Even now, while I write it, I feel ashamed.

It is almost six o'clock, and my maid says I must begin to dress. So I will stop. Adieu, my dear Sophy. I love you just as much as I did in the convent, and perhaps even more, because I miss you more.

P.S. I do not yet know how I shall send this letter. I must wait until Josephine comes.

## Letter 2

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

Return, my dear Viscount. Return at once. I do not know how you can waste your days in the country with that old aunt of yours, especially when her fortune is already settled for you and there is nothing more to win there. Come back the moment this letter reaches your hands. I need you, and I need you now.

A very pleasing idea has come to me, and I wish to trust its execution to you. That alone should be enough. You should feel honoured that I have chosen you. You should run to me without delay, proud to receive my orders. But I know you

too well. You have grown lazy under my kindness, and you no longer value my favour as you once did. Even so, I will tell you what I have planned. Only remember this: before you begin any new adventure, this one must be done.

It is an affair worthy of you. In it you will find both pleasure and revenge. It will be one more shining act in the story of your life. Yes, I say the story of your life, because I still think your memoirs should one day be written, and I might even take that labour upon myself. But I leave that dream and come to what matters now.

Madame de Volanges means to marry her daughter. It is still a secret, but she told me of it yesterday. And do you know whom she has chosen as the future husband? Count Gercourt.

Gercourt.

Does that name not wake you? Have you forgotten the affair of Madame the Intendante? Have you forgotten how he once placed himself above us, as if he were made to triumph and others were made to serve his vanity? You may be slow, my dear Viscount, but I am not. I have not forgotten. I have good reason to hate him, and I mean to enjoy my revenge.

You know his proud ideas. He wants a wife who comes fresh from a convent. He admires innocence as if it were a jewel chosen for his own hand. He also has foolish tastes and little fixed opinions that amuse me greatly. Had Mademoiselle de Volanges not been educated in a convent, had she not had the appearance that pleases him, perhaps even her fortune would not have been enough to attract him. But now he imagines he has found perfection.

Let us teach him what a fool he is.

Think what pleasure there would be in this. He will marry believing himself safe. He will boast of his choice. He will speak of purity, modesty, and education. And then, if the little girl has been properly formed before he takes her, Paris will laugh at him for years. Nothing is sweeter than a proud man made ridiculous by the very thing in which he trusted most.

The girl is worth the trouble. She is very pretty. She is only fifteen. She is like a rosebud just opening. Best of all, she is awkward, simple, and entirely unformed.

She has not yet learned the world. You men do not care much for polish at first, and in this case such ignorance is useful. There is in her a soft, tender look that promises much. I recommend her to you. That should be enough.

You will receive this letter tomorrow morning. I expect to see you tomorrow evening at seven. I shall receive no one else before eight, not even the Chevalier, who happens, for the present, to be the favourite of my idle hours. He is not fit for serious work. At eight I shall release you. Then, at ten, you may come and sup where the mother and daughter will also be. So all is arranged.

Do not fail me. Do not delay. I want obedience, not excuses.

Farewell. It is already past noon, and I have other matters to attend to.

## Part 2

### Letter 3

#### The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

I have received your letter, my charming friend, and I must tell you at once that I cannot obey you. Not that your plan does not amuse me. On the contrary, it is full of wit and malice, and you know well that such things always please me. But I am now engaged in an enterprise so interesting that I cannot abandon it, even for the pleasure of serving you.

You speak lightly of the country, but you do not know what I have discovered here. Near the castle of my aunt lives a woman who is the most virtuous creature in the world. Her name is Madame de Tourvel. She is young, beautiful, pious, and married to a husband who is away from her. In short, she has every quality that makes resistance strong and conquest glorious.

I have been here for only a few days, and already I see clearly the path that must be followed. This woman believes herself safe. She trusts in her virtue, in her religion, in her reputation. She believes that a man like me cannot approach her without her seeing the danger. Such confidence is charming. It makes the victory more certain and also more delightful.

You ask me to corrupt a little girl who has just left her convent. That might be amusing for a moment, but what glory would there be in it? A child is easily surprised. She does not know the world, and she has no defense. But Madame de Tourvel is another matter. She knows the dangers. She fears them. She fights against them. When such a woman falls, the triumph is complete.

Already I observe her carefully. Yesterday she came to visit my aunt. She spoke little, but when she spoke her voice was soft and serious. She lowered her eyes often. Yet I noticed that sometimes she looked at me quickly, as if she wished to judge me and did not wish to be seen doing so. That small movement told me more than a long speech.

At dinner she spoke of charity, of religion, of duty. You know how well I can listen with respect when it is useful. I praised her ideas. I admired her goodness. I even allowed myself to appear touched by her virtue. My aunt was delighted with me. Madame de Tourvel seemed surprised.

Later, when we walked in the garden, I helped her across a little path where the ground was uneven. She thanked me with a serious smile and said that politeness was always pleasing. I answered that it was not politeness but admiration. She looked troubled and changed the subject at once.

You see that the game has begun.

You will laugh at me, perhaps, because I speak of admiration. But believe me, I know what I am doing. With such a woman one must proceed slowly. A careless word would destroy everything. She must believe that she inspires respect, not desire. When she feels safe, then the danger begins.

I have already taken one step that pleased me very much. This morning I visited a poor family in the village. Madame de Tourvel often helps them. I gave them money and spoke to them kindly. When she heard of it, she was touched. My aunt told me that Madame de Tourvel said, "Mr. de Valmont has a generous heart."

A generous heart! You see how well the mask fits.

My dear friend, do not try to call me away from such a charming task. If you saw this woman, if you heard her speak of duty with those calm eyes and that pure voice, you would understand why I cannot abandon the field. To defeat such virtue

is worth more than ten easy victories.

Besides, I do not forget you. If the little Volanges is truly as pretty as you say, I will think about her later. Perhaps, when Madame de Tourvel is conquered, I may return to Paris and amuse myself with your plan. But for the moment I must remain here.

You know my motto: victory or death. I shall stay until I have obtained one or the other.

Farewell, my beautiful friend. Do not be angry with me. When I return, I promise to bring you a story that will make even you admire my skill.

#### Letter 4

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

You are a strange man, Viscount. I ask you for help in a plan that would give you pleasure and honour, and you answer me with a sermon about virtue. I almost thought, while reading your letter, that you had become honest.

But do not worry. I know you too well to believe such nonsense.

You speak of Madame de Tourvel as if she were some rare treasure. You admire her virtue, you respect her piety, you praise her goodness. All this is very pretty. But tell me honestly: have you already begun to love her?

If that were true, I should laugh very much. The great Valmont defeated by a woman who reads prayers and speaks of charity! What a story that would be! Paris would enjoy it greatly.

Do not be offended. I do not accuse you. I only observe that men sometimes mistake vanity for courage. You say that conquering a virtuous woman is more glorious than corrupting a young girl. Perhaps. But it is also more dangerous. A man who fights too long against virtue sometimes begins to respect it. From respect to weakness there is only a small step.

As for your mask of generosity, I know it well. You have used it many times, and often with success. But take care. If you play the good man too long, people may begin to believe it. And then you might even begin to believe it yourself.

Let us return to the real matter.

You refuse to come to Paris. Very well. I will not command you again. But remember that you have lost a fine opportunity. The little Volanges would have been easy to manage. She is young, foolish, and entirely guided by her mother. Such innocence is soft clay in the hands of an artist.

Since you refuse the work, perhaps I shall do it myself.

Yes, why not? I see the girl often now. Her mother trusts me completely. She believes me to be a model of wisdom and virtue. I give her advice about the education of her daughter. She listens with respect. It is very amusing.

Yesterday I spoke with the little one for a long time. She is simple, curious, and easily frightened. When she blushes, her whole face becomes red like a flower in the sun. I asked her about the convent. She told me many small stories with great seriousness. At last I asked if she knew that she was to be married.

She turned pale at once and said she did not know it for certain.

That answer pleased me greatly.

You see that the game can continue without you. Still, I confess that I would have preferred to work with you. Our victories together have always been more elegant.

Continue your noble campaign against Madame de Tourvel. I wish you success. If you truly conquer her, I shall be the first to applaud. But remember that promises are dangerous things. You once promised to obey me.

I shall watch your progress with interest.

Farewell, Viscount. Do not forget that Paris still exists, and that I am in it.

Part 3

Letter 5

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Mademoiselle Volanges

My dear child, your mother has told me that you have returned home from the convent. I wished at once to write to you and welcome you into the world. Until

now you have lived among quiet walls, guided by good women who taught you prayer, music, and modest behavior. All that is very proper for a young girl. But life outside the convent is different, and it is well that you have a friend who can help you understand it.

Your mother is one of my oldest friends. She has always shown me much kindness, and I love her sincerely. Because of that affection, I already feel a sort of tenderness for you. I remember when you were only a little child, and now I hear that you have grown into a very pretty young lady. I am sure you will soon please everyone who sees you.

The world, however, is not as simple as the convent. There are many people, many opinions, and many dangers. A young girl must learn to observe carefully and to speak little. She must listen more than she talks. She must never appear curious, though she should always be attentive. In that way she will understand everything without exposing herself.

I do not wish to frighten you. On the contrary, I wish to help you. If you have any doubts, any small questions about the world, you may always write to me. I will answer you with the tenderness of an older sister. Your mother will approve of this friendship, because she knows that I desire only your happiness.

You will soon see many new faces. Some people will praise you, others will judge you. None of that should trouble you. It is natural for a young girl who leaves a convent to feel uncertain at first. But if you remain modest and sincere, everyone will admire you.

I hope we shall meet very soon. Your mother often invites me to her house, and I look forward to the pleasure of seeing you there. Until that moment, believe in my friendship and my good wishes.

Farewell, my dear child.

Letter 6

Cecilia Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I have received your letter, and I thank you very much for your

kindness. My mother told me that you were one of her closest friends, and she advised me to answer you at once. I feel honoured that you wish to guide me, because I know that I still understand very little about the world.

Everything is new to me here. In the convent the days were always the same. We woke at the same hour, we prayed, we studied, and we walked in the garden. Now the hours change every day. People come and go. Sometimes there are visitors, sometimes we go out in the carriage. I do not yet know how to behave in all these situations.

When I first arrived home, I was very excited. I had my own room and my own maid, and I thought that freedom would be delightful. But soon I felt a little lonely. In the convent I always had my companions near me. We talked together about everything. Here I often sit alone, and I do not always know what to do.

My mother is very kind, but she is often busy. She receives many letters and many visitors. When she speaks to me, she asks if I am studying my music or practicing my drawing. She tells me that a young lady must have many accomplishments. I try to follow her advice, but sometimes I feel that I would rather talk with someone who understands me.

That is why your letter pleased me so much. You say that I may write to you if I have questions. I do not yet know what questions to ask, but I am sure they will come soon. Already I hear people speak of many things that I do not fully understand.

For example, yesterday my mother spoke of a gentleman who may come to visit us. She did not say much, but I believe he is connected with my future marriage. The thought of marriage frightens me a little. I know that many young ladies are happy when they marry, but I cannot imagine what that life will be like.

In the convent we sometimes spoke of marriage as if it were a distant story. Now it seems very near, and I feel confused. I hope that when we meet you will explain many things to me.

My mother tells me that we may see you soon. I look forward to that day very much. Until then, please accept my gratitude for your friendship.

I remain, with respect,

## Cecilia Volanges

### Letter 7

#### The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

You accuse me of loving Madame de Tourvel. That idea amused me greatly. I assure you that I admire her virtue, but admiration is not love. If I appear serious when I speak of her, it is because the campaign requires patience. A general does not laugh loudly when he approaches a strong fortress.

Since my last letter, several small events have taken place. Each one seems unimportant, but together they advance my design.

Madame de Tourvel continues to visit my aunt almost every day. At first she tried to avoid long conversations with me. She spoke politely but with reserve. Now I see that she is less afraid. She begins to believe that I respect her completely.

Yesterday morning we walked in the garden again. The weather was warm, and the air smelled of flowers. My aunt soon left us to speak with a servant. Madame de Tourvel and I remained together on the path. She seemed uneasy, perhaps because we were alone.

I spoke to her about charity and good works. I told her that her kindness to the poor had touched me deeply. She answered modestly that she did nothing extraordinary. When I praised her again, she begged me not to exaggerate.

Then I said quietly, "Madam, goodness like yours is rare. It inspires admiration and respect."

She looked at me with surprise and answered, "Sir, if you truly respect virtue, you should protect it."

That sentence pleased me greatly. It shows that she already sees me as a danger.

I replied, "I hope never to offend you. Your opinion is too precious to me."

She seemed troubled and changed the subject at once.

Later I performed another small act that will not escape her notice. A peasant in the village has been ill for several days. I went to see him and brought medicine. My aunt told Madame de Tourvel about it. She thanked me warmly and said that

generosity was a noble quality.

You see how well everything progresses.

Yet I must confess something that will make you smile. Sometimes, when she speaks with that calm voice and those serious eyes, I almost believe that virtue exists. For a moment I forget my role and listen with real attention. Then I remember myself, and the illusion disappears.

Do not worry. I am still Valmont.

Continue your lessons with the little Volanges if it amuses you. I imagine that you will soon turn her head completely. When I return to Paris, perhaps I shall find her already well prepared.

Farewell, my charming friend. If my victory here is as glorious as I expect, you will be forced to admire me.

#### Part 4

#### Letter 8

Madame de Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, I must thank you again for the kindness you show to my daughter. Since she returned from the convent, she has spoken of you with great affection. Your letter pleased her very much, and she already seems to trust you as if you were an older sister.

I confess that this friendship gives me real comfort. Cecilia is still very young, and she has seen almost nothing of the world. The convent kept her innocent, which I consider a great advantage. But that same innocence makes her uncertain now that she has returned home. She observes everything with surprise, and sometimes I see that she does not know how to judge what she hears.

For that reason I am grateful that she may look to you for advice. You have always united wisdom with grace, and I am sure that your guidance will help her greatly. I would prefer that she learn from a friend like you rather than from the careless talk of society.

I must also tell you that the matter of her marriage is moving forward. You know already that Count Gercourt has asked for her hand. The agreement is not yet publicly announced, but everything seems settled. He is expected to return soon from his travels, and when he arrives the final arrangements will be made.

I believe this marriage will be very suitable. The Count has a good name and an honourable position. His fortune is solid, and his character is respected. Most importantly, he wished for a young wife who has been carefully educated and who comes directly from the convent. That preference seemed to me a sign of good principles.

Cecilia knows something of this plan, though not all the details. I prefer that she become accustomed gradually to the idea of marriage. At her age such news can excite the imagination too strongly. Already I see that she grows thoughtful whenever the subject is mentioned.

I hope that you will continue to speak with her kindly and guide her little by little. If she learns from you the proper manner of a young lady, I shall feel more at ease when the time comes for her to enter society.

I expect that you will soon visit us again. Cecilia looks forward to seeing you, and I too shall be delighted by your company.

Believe in my sincere friendship.

Madame de Volanges

Letter 9

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

I have read your last letter with much amusement. Your campaign against virtue advances, it seems, with admirable patience. You speak of gardens, of charity, and of gentle conversations. I almost expected to hear that you had begun reading prayer books.

But I will not laugh too much. Perhaps you are right to proceed slowly. Madame de Tourvel appears to be one of those women who fear scandal more than they fear temptation. With such a person the smallest step must be carefully prepared.

While you play the good man in the country, I continue my own little work in Paris. The young Cecilia Volanges has become very interesting to me. Her innocence is even greater than I first believed. She blushes at the smallest word and becomes silent whenever she thinks she has said something foolish.

Yesterday she visited me with her mother. I had the pleasure of observing her closely for several hours. At first she sat very straight in her chair, as if she were still in the convent classroom. She answered my questions with great seriousness and looked at her mother each time she spoke, as if asking permission with her eyes.

Such modesty would please Count Gercourt very much.

Later I found an opportunity to speak with her alone for a few minutes. I asked whether she enjoyed her new life in the world. She told me that she often felt confused because so many things were new to her. That confession was charming.

Then I asked whether she had many friends. She said she had none except those she left in the convent. I answered that she must soon meet many agreeable young people in society. At that moment her face became red, and she said softly that she was afraid of society.

Afraid! You see what delightful material I have before me.

I reassured her gently and told her that society is not dangerous when one has good friends. She looked at me with such gratitude that I almost laughed. It is pleasant to be trusted so completely.

You will be curious to know whether she suspects the plan for her marriage. She has heard something of it, but she does not yet understand what marriage truly means. Her imagination is filled with childish ideas. In short, she is exactly as Count Gercourt wishes to find her.

That thought gives me great pleasure.

I continue to guide her slowly, without appearing to do so. She already writes to me as if I were her protector. In time she will tell me everything she thinks and feels. When that moment arrives, the rest will be easy.

Continue your noble battle with Madame de Tourvel. When you return to Paris, perhaps you will discover that my pupil has made considerable progress.

Farewell, Viscount. I wish you patience, because patience is sometimes the most dangerous weapon.

Letter 10

Cecilia Volanges to Sophia Carnay

My dear Sophy, how I wish you were here with me! Every day something new happens, and I often feel that I have no one to whom I can speak freely except you.

Yesterday my mother took me to visit the Marchioness de Merteuil. I had heard her name many times, but this was the first time I saw her since leaving the convent. She received us with great kindness and spoke to me as if she had known me for many years.

At first I was very shy. Her house is beautiful, and there were many elegant objects in the room. I was afraid that I might say something foolish. But she soon made me feel more comfortable. She asked about the convent, about my music, and about my friends.

When my mother left the room for a short time, the Marchioness continued speaking with me. She told me that a young lady must not fear society. She said that the world may appear frightening at first, but that it becomes pleasant when one learns how to behave.

I confessed to her that I sometimes feel uncertain. In the convent everything was simple. Here I hear many things that I do not understand. People speak of marriages, visits, and conversations that seem mysterious to me.

She smiled and said that all young girls feel the same when they first leave the convent. She promised that she would help me learn little by little. Her words were so kind that I almost felt ready to tell her every thought in my heart.

After we returned home, I kept thinking about what she had said. My mother also spoke again of the gentleman who may become my husband. She did not say much, but I saw that she considers the matter almost settled.

Sophy, I cannot explain what I feel when I think of it. Sometimes I imagine that

marriage must be very pleasant. A husband will protect his wife, and they will share their lives together. But at other moments I feel afraid, because I do not know this gentleman at all.

If you were here, we would talk about it for hours, just as we did in the convent garden. Do you remember those evenings when we walked together and spoke about the future? At that time marriage seemed like a distant dream. Now it is suddenly near.

I will write again soon and tell you everything that happens.

Adieu, my dear Sophy. I embrace you with all my heart.

## Part 5

### Letter 11

#### The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

You wish to know how my campaign progresses. I will satisfy your curiosity. I must confess that the resistance of Madame de Tourvel continues to interest me greatly. Each day I discover some new movement of her mind, and each movement reveals both strength and weakness.

Yesterday provided a small event that amused me very much.

Madame de Tourvel came again to visit my aunt. She appeared more serious than usual. During dinner she spoke little and often seemed lost in thought. I suspected that she had begun to reflect on the danger she imagines in my presence.

After the meal we walked in the garden. My aunt soon left us, as she often does, because she enjoys resting in the afternoon. Madame de Tourvel and I remained alone under the trees.

For some time we spoke only of simple things: the weather, the village, the condition of the fields. She answered politely but without warmth. I could see that she wished to end the conversation quickly.

At last she stopped and said with some firmness, "Sir, I must ask you something."

I bowed and answered that I was ready to listen.

She continued, "You have shown great kindness toward the poor families of this village. I respect such generosity. But I hope you will allow me to speak frankly. Your attentions to me are beginning to trouble me."

I looked at her with surprise, as if I did not understand.

"Madam," I said, "if my behaviour has offended you, I regret it sincerely. My only wish has been to express my admiration for your virtues."

She replied quickly, "That is exactly what I fear. Admiration can easily become something else."

Those words pleased me more than I can say. They show that she already thinks about me more than she wishes.

I answered with great calm, "Madam, you believe me capable of feelings that I have not expressed."

She lowered her eyes and said, "Perhaps. But it is better to avoid danger than to fight it."

Then she added that she would visit my aunt less often in the future.

Imagine my delight when I heard this decision. A retreat like that is always the first sign of fear. And fear, my dear friend, is the beginning of defeat.

I did not try to stop her. On the contrary, I praised her prudence and said that her peace of mind must always come before everything else. Such modest submission confused her completely.

She looked at me for a moment, as if she could not decide whether to believe me. Then she thanked me and left the garden.

When she had gone, I walked slowly back to the house and laughed to myself. If she truly avoids me, she will think of me all the time. If she returns, she will feel that she has already taken one step toward me.

In either case, I gain ground.

Continue your lessons with the little Volanges. I see that you enjoy them greatly. When I return to Paris, I shall expect to find your pupil advanced in knowledge.

Farewell, my charming friend. The war against virtue continues, and I remain confident of victory.

## Letter 12

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

Your last letter has convinced me of one thing: you are enjoying yourself too much. When you begin to describe gardens, walks, and gentle conversations with such care, it means that you have forgotten the true purpose of the enterprise.

Do not misunderstand me. I admire patience, and I know that a woman like Madame de Tourvel cannot be conquered in a single day. But I fear that your admiration for her virtue may grow stronger than your desire to defeat it.

Still, I will not judge too quickly. Continue your work, and perhaps you will prove me wrong.

As for me, I am very pleased with the progress of my own design.

Cecilia Volanges now writes to me regularly. Her letters are full of innocent questions and little confessions. She tells me what she feels, what she fears, and what she hopes. Each line shows how completely she trusts me.

Yesterday she came to visit me again. Her mother remained only a short time before leaving us together. I seized the opportunity to observe my young pupil more carefully.

She spoke with excitement about the new life she is beginning to see around her. She told me that she sometimes hears people laugh at stories she does not understand. She wonders why certain words cause embarrassment.

I answered her questions with great seriousness. I explained that the world contains many hidden meanings and that a young lady must learn to protect herself by understanding them. She listened with wide eyes and thanked me warmly.

Such gratitude is very convenient.

I also asked whether she had seen many young gentlemen. She blushed deeply and said that she had spoken to almost none. I replied that this was natural for someone who has just left the convent.

Then I told her that she should not fear conversation with men, provided she behaves with dignity. She seemed relieved to hear this advice.

Little by little she begins to see me as the guide who will lead her through the mysteries of society. When that confidence becomes complete, the rest will be easy.

You see, my dear Viscount, that I am working no less carefully than you.

When Count Gercourt returns and discovers what has happened to his perfect bride, I shall remember that you refused the honour of assisting me.

Farewell. Continue to write to me about your virtuous lady. I find the story very entertaining.

Letter 13

Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I must speak to you about a matter that troubles me. You know that I have often visited the aunt of Mr. de Valmont during my stay in this region. At first these visits were simple and pleasant. But recently I have begun to feel uneasy in his presence.

Mr. de Valmont behaves with politeness and respect. I cannot accuse him of any open fault. Yet there is something in his manner that disturbs my peace of mind.

He praises virtue with such warmth that I sometimes fear he speaks with another intention. When he looks at me, I feel that he observes me too closely. Perhaps I imagine these things. Still, the feeling remains.

For that reason I have decided to reduce my visits to his aunt. I believe that avoiding unnecessary conversation is the safest course.

You may think that I exaggerate the danger. But I know the reputation of Mr. de Valmont in society. His past behaviour has not always been guided by honour. A woman who respects her duty must be cautious.

I tell you this because I value your friendship and your judgment. If you think I am mistaken, you may say so freely. But until I hear your opinion, I prefer to remain careful.

Pray for me, my dear friend, that I may always follow the path of duty.

Madame de Tourvel

Part 6

Letter 14

Madame de Volanges to Madame de Tourvel

My dear and respected friend, I have received your letter and thank you for the confidence you have shown in writing to me so frankly. Your caution does you honour, and I believe that in this matter your instincts are wise.

You say that Mr. de Valmont behaves with politeness and respect. That may very well be true. Yet politeness does not always reveal the true character of a man. There are people who know how to appear admirable while hiding intentions that are far from honourable.

Since you ask my opinion, I will speak openly. I do not trust Mr. de Valmont.

His reputation in Paris is known to everyone who pays attention to such things. He has often amused himself with women whose trust he did not deserve. Many hearts have been wounded by his vanity. A man who treats affection as a game rarely changes his habits.

You know how much I value prudence in a woman. In your position it is better to avoid even the appearance of danger. Society judges quickly, and a single moment of carelessness can give rise to rumours that last for years.

For that reason I approve completely of your decision to visit his aunt less frequently. Distance is often the simplest protection. If Mr. de Valmont truly respects you, he will understand your choice. If he does not understand it, that will only confirm the wisdom of your caution.

Forgive me if I speak strongly. My friendship for you obliges me to warn you of what I know. Your virtue and reputation are too precious to risk in an unnecessary acquaintance.

Continue to act with the dignity that has always distinguished you. In that way you will silence every malicious tongue and remain an example for others.

Believe always in my sincere attachment.

Madame de Volanges

## Letter 15

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

You will be pleased to hear that events have taken an interesting turn. I have obtained a letter written by Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges. In it she speaks of me with great seriousness and even with fear. Imagine how much that discovery delighted me.

The letter was not meant for my eyes, of course. But chance sometimes favours those who know how to observe. A servant who carries letters in this house is not very careful, and I was able to see the paper for a moment before it was sealed.

In that letter Madame de Tourvel warns her friend against me. She speaks of my reputation and advises caution. She even declares that she will avoid my company in the future.

What could be more encouraging?

When a woman writes such things, it means that she already thinks of the man she fears more than she wishes. If I had truly been indifferent to her, she would never have taken the trouble to describe me at such length.

Since then I have continued my role with even greater care. I behave with the most perfect respect. I speak little and avoid every appearance of boldness. When we meet, I seem almost embarrassed by my own presence.

Yesterday we encountered each other in the church of the village. She was kneeling in prayer. When she rose and saw me near the door, she looked troubled but remained calm. I bowed silently and moved aside to let her pass.

Such modest behaviour produced exactly the effect I desired. She hesitated for a moment, as if she expected some attempt at conversation. When none came, she appeared surprised.

Later my aunt told me that Madame de Tourvel had praised my conduct and said that she might have judged me too harshly.

You see how easily suspicion turns into confidence when one knows how to guide it.

Still, I will confess something that may amuse you. When I saw her kneeling in prayer, there was an expression on her face so pure and serious that for a moment I felt almost ashamed of my intentions. It lasted only a moment, of course. I soon remembered that such virtue deserves to be tested.

The war continues.

Tell me more about your young Cecilia. I imagine that she still believes every word you say. Such innocence must be delightful to observe.

Farewell, my charming friend. I promise that the story of Madame de Tourvel will end in a manner worthy of my reputation.

Letter 16

Cecilia Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear Madam, I hope you will forgive me for writing again so soon, but I feel that I must speak to someone who understands me. Since our last conversation I have thought often about the advice you gave me.

Yesterday evening we had visitors at our house. Among them was a young gentleman whose name is the Chevalier Danceny. My mother knows him through some friends, and he came to play music with us.

At first I was very shy. I did not know how to speak to him, and I feared that I might appear foolish. But when he began to play the harp with me, everything became easier. He spoke gently and asked about my music lessons in the convent.

We played several pieces together, and he praised my playing more than I deserved. Each time he spoke kindly I felt my face grow warm. I do not know why such simple words affected me so strongly.

After the music we talked for a few minutes. He told me that he enjoys poetry and that he often writes verses himself. I did not know what to answer, so I listened quietly.

When he left, he bowed to my mother and then to me. I noticed that he looked

at me for a moment longer than politeness required. Perhaps I imagined it.

Since then I have wondered whether it was wrong for me to enjoy that conversation so much. My heart beat very fast while we were speaking, and even now I feel confused when I remember it.

You once told me that a young lady must learn to understand the world little by little. Perhaps this is one of those moments. I do not know what these feelings mean, and that is why I write to you.

Please tell me honestly if I have behaved badly or if such emotions are natural. I trust your judgment completely.

Cecilia Volanges

Part 7

Letter 17

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, I hope you will forgive the boldness of this letter. I know very well that a young lady who has just left the convent must be protected from every appearance of impropriety. Yet I cannot remain silent after the pleasure I experienced yesterday evening.

When I had the honour of playing music with you, I discovered not only a charming musician but also a heart full of sincerity and grace. Your modesty touched me deeply. I left your house with a feeling that I cannot easily describe.

Perhaps I should have remained silent. But silence would have been impossible for me. Since yesterday your image has remained constantly in my thoughts. Each note we played together returns to my memory, and each word you spoke seems more precious than before.

I ask you to believe that my intentions are entirely respectful. I would never dare to offend you or to disturb the peace of your family. Yet I could not forgive myself if I allowed this opportunity to pass without telling you how much admiration you have inspired in me.

If this letter displeases you, I beg you to destroy it and forget that it was ever written. But if you believe that friendship between us might be permitted, even in the most innocent form, then I shall consider myself the happiest of men.

I will not write again unless you give me some sign that my letter has not offended you. Until then I remain with the deepest respect,

Your humble servant,  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 18

Cecilia Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear Madam, I write to you in great confusion. Something has happened that I do not know how to judge, and I feel that I must ask your advice immediately.

This morning my maid brought me a letter. At first I believed it must be from one of my old companions in the convent. But when I opened it, I saw that it was written by the Chevalier Danceny.

I was so surprised that I could hardly continue reading. My heart began to beat quickly, and I felt both pleased and frightened at the same time.

His letter is very respectful. He speaks of the music we played together and says that he admired my modesty. But he also writes that he cannot stop thinking about me. When I read those words, I felt my face grow hot again.

I do not know what I should do. In the convent we were taught that young ladies must not receive letters from gentlemen. Yet his letter seems so polite that I do not wish to believe it contains anything wrong.

I have not shown the letter to my mother. I was afraid that she might become angry and forbid me to see him again. But I also fear that hiding it may be a fault.

You are the only person to whom I feel able to speak openly. Please tell me what I should do. Should I answer him? Should I return the letter without reading it again? Or should I pretend that I never received it?

I feel very troubled because part of me wishes to keep the letter and read it again. When I remember his kindness yesterday evening, I cannot help smiling.

Perhaps I am behaving like a foolish child. That is why I ask your advice.  
I wait impatiently for your answer.  
Cecilia Volanges

## Letter 19

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, I have received your letter and thank you for the confidence you place in me. You were right to write to me at once, because situations like this require both prudence and calm reflection.

First, you must not blame yourself too severely. It is natural that a young gentleman who has enjoyed your company should wish to express his admiration. Such letters are not uncommon in society.

However, you were also correct to feel uncertain about how to respond. A young lady must always protect her reputation carefully. Even the most innocent correspondence can become dangerous if it is not guided with wisdom.

For the moment, I advise you not to answer the Chevalier Danceny directly. Silence will allow you time to consider the situation without committing yourself.

At the same time, you should not destroy his letter. It is useful to understand the feelings of those who admire us. By reading his words again, you may judge whether his admiration is sincere or merely a passing fancy.

You see that prudence does not require cruelty.

If the Chevalier truly respects you, he will behave patiently and with dignity. If he writes again, we will decide together what answer may be proper.

Above all, do not allow yourself to become frightened. These small events are part of the education that every young lady receives when she enters society. With time you will learn to judge such matters calmly.

Continue to trust me, and I will guide you as best I can.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

## Letter 20

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, while you continue your devout courtship of Madame de Tourvel, I have begun another little drama here in Paris.

The young Cecilia Volanges has received a declaration of admiration from the Chevalier Danceny. The poor child was so alarmed that she ran at once to consult me. Imagine my pleasure when I saw how completely she depended on my advice.

I told her not to answer him yet. Of course that is only the beginning of the lesson.

Danceny appears to be sincerely attached to her. He is young, romantic, and rather inexperienced. In short, he is exactly the sort of man who writes long letters and believes every word he writes.

Such characters are very convenient.

My plan is simple. I shall encourage their affection little by little while appearing to restrain it. In this way the young lovers will see me as their protector. They will confide everything to me, and I shall guide their actions without their suspecting it.

Think what pleasure there will be in preparing the innocent bride of Count Gercourt in this manner.

When the Count finally marries her, he will believe that he has obtained the purest and most obedient wife in France. Meanwhile we shall know the truth.

You see, my dear friend, that your refusal to assist me has not prevented my amusement.

Continue your efforts with Madame de Tourvel. I am curious to see whether your patience will truly defeat her virtue.

Farewell. I await the next chapter of your pious adventure.

## Part 8

## Letter 21

## The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Your last letter amused me greatly. I see that your little pupil progresses quickly under your instruction. The young Danceny appears to be exactly the sort of instrument you enjoy using. I congratulate you on the cleverness of your plan.

As for my own affair, matters continue to advance slowly but surely. Madame de Tourvel still attempts to avoid me, yet circumstances often bring us together. Each meeting produces some new movement in her mind.

Two days ago a small incident occurred that revealed much to me.

A poor family in the village had lost their house in a fire. When Madame de Tourvel heard the news, she went immediately to bring them assistance. I was informed of this visit and decided to go there as well.

When I arrived, she was already speaking with the unfortunate family. Her voice was gentle and full of compassion. She gave them money and promised to help rebuild their home.

I approached quietly and offered my help also. At first she seemed surprised to see me there, but she could not refuse my assistance without appearing unkind. Together we spoke with the villagers and arranged what could be done.

When the family began to thank us, they looked at us with such gratitude that Madame de Tourvel appeared deeply moved. Tears came into her eyes.

At that moment I said softly, "Madam, goodness like yours makes the world less unhappy."

She answered quickly, "Sir, charity belongs to everyone."

Then she added, "You have done a generous thing today."

I replied, "If I have done anything good, it is because your example inspired me."

Those words troubled her greatly. She tried to change the conversation, but I could see that she was affected.

Later, when we walked back toward the village road, she spoke with unusual seriousness.

"Mr. de Valmont," she said, "I fear that people will misunderstand your

intentions.”

I answered calmly, “My only intention is to deserve your esteem.”

She remained silent for several moments. At last she said, “That is precisely what makes me uneasy.”

You see how charming this struggle becomes. She wishes to believe that I am honourable, yet she fears the consequences of believing it.

Continue your lessons with Cecilia and her poet. Their innocence must provide you with many amusing observations.

For my part, I remain determined to carry my enterprise to its conclusion.

Farewell, my charming friend.

## Letter 22

### The Chevalier Danceny to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I take the liberty of writing to you because I know that you enjoy the confidence of Mademoiselle de Volanges. I would not dare to address you if the matter were not of great importance to me.

Some days ago I wrote a letter to Mademoiselle de Volanges in which I expressed my admiration for her. Since that moment I have received no answer. I fear that my boldness may have offended her.

Yet I cannot persuade myself that such gentleness could respond with anger. Her modesty is so sincere that perhaps she simply does not know how to answer.

If my letter has indeed displeased her, I beg you to believe that I regret it deeply. My only wish was to honour her virtues and to assure her of the respect she inspires.

Because you are her friend and adviser, I hoped you might tell me whether I have committed an unforgivable error. If silence is the only answer she wishes to give, I shall accept it with sorrow but without complaint.

Still, I cannot deny that the thought of losing her esteem causes me great pain. Since the evening when we played music together, I have thought of little else.

I know that you possess both kindness and wisdom. If you judge that my

feelings are sincere and honourable, perhaps you will reassure Mademoiselle de Volanges that my intentions deserve no blame.

I trust your judgment completely and await your reply with anxiety.

With profound respect,

Chevalier Danceny

## Letter 23

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Chevalier Danceny

Chevalier, your letter reached me yesterday, and I understand the uneasiness you describe. A young man who writes with sincerity may easily fear that his words have been misunderstood.

I will speak frankly.

Mademoiselle de Volanges was indeed surprised when she received your letter. She is very innocent and has only recently left the convent. For that reason she does not yet know how to respond to such expressions of admiration.

However, I assure you that she was not offended.

On the contrary, she spoke of you with respect and even with a certain pleasure. Her hesitation comes not from anger but from modesty. She fears that answering you might appear improper.

In such situations patience is the most honourable course. If your feelings are sincere, you will not wish to hurry a young lady who is still learning the customs of society.

I advise you therefore to remain calm and respectful. With time Mademoiselle de Volanges will understand that your admiration is guided by honour and not by frivolity.

Until that moment arrives, you may trust me to watch over her interests as well as yours.

Your sentiments appear worthy of confidence, and I hope that prudence will allow them to develop without danger.

Believe in my goodwill.

## The Marchioness de Merteuil

### Letter 24

Cecilia Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear Madam, I received your last letter and followed your advice carefully. I did not answer the Chevalier Danceny, though I confess that it was difficult to remain silent.

Since then something else has happened.

Yesterday evening we had visitors again, and the Chevalier was among them. When he entered the room and saw me, he bowed respectfully but did not attempt to speak to me at first. I believe he feared that I might be angry.

Later we played music together once more. While we were turning the pages of the score, he said very softly, "I hope I have not offended you."

I answered that I was not offended, but that I did not know whether I should answer his letter.

He looked so relieved when I said those words that I almost laughed.

We spoke only a few moments, but during that time I felt the same strange happiness that I experienced before. I cannot explain it, yet I know that I enjoyed the conversation very much.

When he left the house he looked at me again with the same expression I noticed before. I believe he wished to speak further but did not dare.

Since that moment I have wondered whether I should finally answer his letter. I remember your advice, and I do not wish to act imprudently.

Please tell me once more what you think is best.

I trust you more than anyone.

Cecilia Volanges

### Part 9

### Letter 25

## The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, your last letter shows me clearly that your heart is both honest and sincere. These qualities are very precious, and you must preserve them carefully while you learn to understand the world around you.

You ask whether you should answer the Chevalier Danceny. Since you have already spoken to him and assured him that he has not offended you, a short reply would now be both polite and reasonable. Silence after such a conversation might appear cold or even unkind.

However, you must write with great prudence.

Your letter should be simple and modest. Do not speak of strong emotions. Instead, thank him politely for the respect he has shown you. Let him see that you value sincerity, but also that you understand the importance of proper behaviour.

In this way you will satisfy his feelings without risking your reputation.

Remember that admiration from a gentleman is not in itself a fault. What matters is the manner in which it is received. A young lady must always appear calm and dignified.

If you wish, you may show me your letter before sending it. I will gladly help you correct anything that might seem imprudent.

Continue to trust me, and you will soon feel less uncertain in these situations.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

## Letter 26

### Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have received the letter that you wrote to me some days ago. I hope you will forgive the delay in my reply. I did not know at first whether it was proper for me to answer you.

I assure you that your words did not offend me. On the contrary, I was touched by the respect you expressed. However, I have only recently left the convent, and

I am still learning the customs of society.

For that reason I feared that answering your letter might appear imprudent.

After careful thought I decided that silence might seem unkind, especially since you spoke with such sincerity. I therefore wish to thank you for the esteem you have shown me.

I also hope that our conversations and our music may continue in a spirit of friendship and respect. Those moments have given me much pleasure.

Please believe that I value your good opinion and that I shall always remember the kindness you have shown.

With respect,

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 27

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your letter has given me more happiness than I can easily describe. When I received it, I read it several times before I could persuade myself that it was truly written by you.

Your kindness in answering me removes the anxiety that troubled me since my last letter. I feared that my admiration had offended you, and that thought caused me real pain.

Now I know that you understand the respect with which I regard you. That knowledge alone would be enough to satisfy me, even if I could never hope for anything more.

Yet I must confess that your letter inspires me with a hope that I had hardly dared to imagine. When you say that our conversations and our music may continue, I feel as if a new happiness has entered my life.

Each time I recall the evening when we played together, I feel the same emotion that filled my heart at that moment. Your modesty, your gentleness, and your sincerity have made an impression on me that grows stronger every day.

Do not fear that I will forget the prudence you recommend. I know that your

reputation must always be protected, and I would rather remain silent forever than cause you the smallest trouble.

Still, if you allow it, I shall treasure every opportunity to see you and to speak with you, even for a few moments.

Believe in the sincerity of my admiration.

With profound respect,

Chevalier Danceny

## Letter 28

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the little drama I described to you continues with charming simplicity. The young lovers now write to each other with all the enthusiasm of innocence.

Cecilia has answered Danceny exactly as I advised her. Her letter is modest and careful, yet it contains enough encouragement to make the poor Chevalier very happy.

As I predicted, he has responded with an even longer declaration. His letter is full of admiration and promises of respect. He appears to believe that he has discovered the most perfect creature in the world.

Such illusions are delightful.

What pleases me most is the complete confidence that both of them place in me. Cecilia shows me every letter she writes, and Danceny writes to me as if I were their guardian.

In this way I hold the threads of their little romance entirely in my hands.

When the moment is right, I will decide how far their affection should advance. You can imagine how amusing it will be when Count Gercourt finally arrives and discovers the situation.

And you, my dear Viscount, how progresses your war against virtue? Your last letter suggested that Madame de Tourvel had begun to fear you more seriously.

Fear is an excellent beginning, but it must be followed by confidence and then

by weakness. I trust that your patience will lead you to that final stage.

Continue to send me news of your progress. I enjoy comparing your noble conquest with my own small intrigues in Paris.

Farewell, my charming friend.

## Part 10

### Letter 29

#### The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, your account of the young Cecilia and her poet has entertained me greatly. I see that you have already arranged their little romance with admirable skill. The innocence of youth is always an agreeable instrument in the hands of a clever director.

As for my own enterprise, the situation has become more delicate and therefore more interesting.

Madame de Tourvel continues to struggle against the feelings she fears. She visits my aunt less frequently than before, yet she has not completely withdrawn. When we meet, she speaks with politeness but with visible effort to remain calm.

Yesterday we encountered each other unexpectedly in the church again. She had just finished her prayers and was walking slowly toward the door. When she saw me standing there, she stopped for a moment as if uncertain whether to continue.

I bowed respectfully and stepped aside to allow her to pass. She hesitated and then said quietly, "Sir, I hope that you will not misunderstand my conduct. If I appear distant, it is only because I wish to avoid any misunderstanding."

I answered, "Madam, I admire your prudence and would never wish to disturb your peace."

She seemed relieved by this answer and added, "I believe that you are capable of honourable sentiments."

Imagine my pleasure when I heard these words.

When a woman begins to defend a man in this way, she already feels the need to justify her opinion of him. That necessity is the first sign of confidence.

I continued in the same respectful tone and said that I valued her esteem above everything else. Then I ended the conversation quickly, as if I feared to prolong it.

This sudden modesty confused her greatly.

Later my aunt told me that Madame de Tourvel had spoken of me with more kindness than before. She said that she may have judged my character too severely.

You see how easily suspicion transforms itself into sympathy when one allows virtue to believe in its own generosity.

Continue your work with Cecilia and Danceny. I imagine that their letters grow longer each day.

Farewell, my charming friend.

## Letter 30

### Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I must write again concerning the subject we discussed in our last correspondence. Since my previous letter I have observed Mr. de Valmont more carefully, and I find myself uncertain how to judge him.

His conduct during the past days has been entirely respectful. On several occasions he has even avoided conversation when it would have been easy for him to approach me.

Yesterday we met in the church, and he behaved with such modest politeness that I could not help feeling ashamed of the suspicions I expressed earlier.

Perhaps I have been unjust.

Yet I remain uneasy. His reputation in society cannot be ignored, and prudence obliges me to remember it. Still, I must confess that his behaviour here does not resemble the portrait that many people describe.

My heart tells me that it is wrong to condemn someone without certain proof. At the same time, my reason warns me not to trust too quickly.

You see how divided I feel.

I hope that distance and caution will allow me to preserve my peace of mind. But I wished to tell you honestly that my judgment is no longer as firm as before.

Pray that I may continue to follow the path of duty without weakness.

Your faithful friend,

Madame de Tourvel

## Letter 31

### The Chevalier Danceny to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I cannot resist the desire to thank you once more for the kindness you have shown me. Since you encouraged me to remain patient and respectful, everything has progressed more happily than I could have hoped.

Mademoiselle de Volanges answered my letter with a generosity that filled me with gratitude. Her words were modest and sincere, exactly as one would expect from a heart so pure.

Yesterday evening I had the honour of seeing her again. We played music together as before. During those moments I felt a happiness that I had never known.

She spoke little, but her manner showed that she no longer feared me. When I asked whether my letter had caused her trouble, she answered that she had been uncertain how to respond but that she valued my respect.

Those simple words gave me more joy than the most passionate declaration.

I know that you have guided her with wisdom, and I am deeply grateful for the interest you take in our situation. Without your advice I might easily have acted with impatience and destroyed the delicate confidence that now exists between us.

If you believe that my sentiments deserve encouragement, I shall continue to follow your guidance faithfully.

Please accept my sincere gratitude and my profound respect.

Chevalier Danceny

## Letter 32

## The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Chevalier Danceny

Chevalier, I am pleased to learn that you have followed my advice with patience and dignity. In matters of the heart, impatience often destroys what sincerity alone could obtain.

Mademoiselle de Volanges is still very young and inexperienced. Her modest hesitation is not a sign of indifference but of innocence. That innocence deserves both admiration and protection.

If you continue to behave with the same respect that you have shown until now, I see no reason why your friendship should not develop naturally.

However, you must remember that the world observes everything. A young lady's reputation is delicate, and even the most innocent affection can become dangerous if it attracts attention.

For that reason I advise you to remain cautious. Let your admiration appear calm rather than passionate. Speak with her as you have done until now, through music and brief conversations that cannot be misunderstood.

In this way your sentiments will be judged honourable, and Mademoiselle de Volanges will feel no reason to fear them.

Continue to trust my advice, and I will always be ready to assist you.

The Marchioness de Merteuil

## Part 11

### Letter 33

#### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, your last letter has confirmed my suspicion that your virtuous lady begins to waver. The change in her tone is already very clear. She once feared you as a dangerous man; now she excuses you as a misunderstood one. That is an excellent beginning.

You know as well as I do that a woman who begins to defend a man against her

own doubts soon finds herself defending him against the judgment of others. At that moment she becomes the accomplice of the very danger she wishes to avoid.

Continue therefore in the path you have chosen. Respect, silence, and apparent modesty are powerful instruments when used with patience.

Meanwhile my own little drama grows more interesting each day.

Cecilia and Danceny now write to each other regularly. Their letters are still full of innocence, but the warmth of their feelings becomes more visible. The poor Chevalier believes that he has discovered the most perfect creature in the world, and Cecilia begins to feel that his admiration is both pleasant and mysterious.

Naturally they confide everything to me.

Yesterday Cecilia brought me two letters: the one she had written and the one she had received. She asked me to read them and to tell her whether they were proper. Imagine how convenient such confidence is.

I praised her modesty and corrected a few expressions that might have appeared too warm. In this way she believes that I protect her reputation, while in truth I encourage her affection little by little.

When Count Gercourt finally arrives, he will find a bride whose heart already belongs elsewhere. That discovery will be a lesson he will not easily forget.

You see, my dear friend, that your absence has not prevented the success of my design.

Continue your siege of Madame de Tourvel. I am curious to know whether the fortress will surrender before you return to Paris.

Farewell.

Letter 34

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My charming friend, I read your last letter with great interest. The progress of your young lovers seems delightful. I can easily imagine the innocence of their letters and the pleasure you take in directing their little romance.

As for my own affair, the situation has become more complicated and therefore

more fascinating.

Madame de Tourvel continues to avoid me whenever she can. Yet when we meet, her manner is no longer cold. Instead she appears troubled, as if she fears her own thoughts more than my presence.

Two days ago we had a conversation that deserves your attention.

My aunt had invited several neighbours to dinner. Madame de Tourvel was among them. During the meal she spoke little, but I noticed that she sometimes looked at me as if she wished to judge my expression.

After dinner we walked in the garden. Several people were present, and the conversation was general. At one moment Madame de Tourvel found herself beside me on a narrow path.

I spoke quietly and said, "Madam, I hope that my presence no longer disturbs you."

She answered with some hesitation, "I believe I may have judged you too severely."

Those words alone would have been enough to satisfy me. But she continued.

"Yet I still believe that distance is the safest course."

I replied, "Your peace of mind must always come before my wishes."

She seemed moved by that answer and said nothing more.

When we returned to the house, my aunt later told me that Madame de Tourvel had praised my conduct again. She said that I appeared very different from the man she had expected to meet.

Such victories may appear small, but each one opens the path to the next.

Believe me, my dear friend, the moment approaches when virtue will begin to doubt itself.

Farewell.

Letter 35

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I hope you will forgive me for writing again so soon. Since our last

conversation I have felt a desire to speak with you more freely than before.

When I first received your letter I was very frightened. I feared that answering it might be improper. But the kindness and respect you have shown have removed that fear little by little.

Yesterday evening when we played music together I felt more at ease than before. Our conversation seemed natural, and I no longer feared that someone might misunderstand it.

Still, I must confess something that may make you smile.

When I return to my room after seeing you, I often remember our conversation and repeat your words in my mind. I wonder whether such thoughts are foolish. Yet I cannot prevent them.

The Marchioness de Merteuil tells me that friendship between two young people is not wrong when it is guided by respect. Her advice has helped me greatly.

If our correspondence continues in the same spirit, I believe that it will bring us both pleasure without causing any fault.

I hope you will think as I do.

With sincere esteem,

Cecilia Volanges

## Letter 36

### The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your letter has filled me with happiness. Each word you write confirms the kindness of your heart and increases the admiration I already felt for you.

When you say that you remember our conversations after we part, you cannot imagine the joy those words give me. I too repeat every moment we have shared.

Your modesty makes you fear that such thoughts may be foolish. To me they are the sweetest proof of your sincerity.

I promise that my admiration will always remain respectful. Nothing would cause me greater pain than to bring the smallest trouble to you.

The Marchioness de Merteuil has shown us great kindness by guiding our

friendship with wisdom. I am grateful to her for protecting the confidence that now exists between us.

If you permit it, I will continue to write to you with the same sincerity that inspired my first letter. Even the smallest reply from you will always be precious to me.

Believe in the devotion with which I remain,  
Your respectful servant,  
Chevalier Danceny

## Part 12

### Letter 37

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, I have received the letters you showed me yesterday, and I must tell you that you have behaved with great prudence. Your reply to the Chevalier Danceny was modest and sincere, exactly as it should have been.

The Chevalier's answer also appears respectful. His admiration is expressed with warmth, yet he does not forget the limits that propriety requires. Such moderation is a good sign.

Still, you must remember that young men sometimes allow their feelings to grow too quickly. A wise young lady must therefore guide the pace of such affection with calm judgment.

Continue to answer him kindly but without excessive enthusiasm. Let him see that you value his esteem, yet also that you understand the importance of dignity.

In this way his respect for you will only increase.

I am pleased that you have trusted me with these letters. Confidence between friends is always the best protection against imprudence.

Whenever you feel uncertain, you may bring your letters to me as before. I will gladly help you judge them.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 38

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I have long hesitated before writing this letter. Yet I believe that silence would now be more dangerous than speaking openly.

You know that I have tried to avoid your company during the past days. I hoped that distance would restore the calm that your presence has disturbed.

Unfortunately I must confess that this effort has not produced the effect I desired.

When I see you, I fear that others may misunderstand our conduct. When I do not see you, I find that my thoughts return to the conversations we have had.

Such a situation cannot continue without endangering the peace of mind that I value above everything else.

For that reason I must ask you to help me.

If you truly respect the principles you have often praised, you will understand that the only solution is to avoid me entirely. Do not seek opportunities to speak with me, and allow me to preserve the tranquillity that my duty requires.

I hope that you will accept this request with the generosity that you have shown in other matters.

Believe that I make it with sincere regret.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 39

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has caused me both pain and admiration.

Pain, because it tells me that my presence disturbs you. Admiration, because it reveals once again the strength of your principles and the sincerity of your virtue.

You ask me to avoid you entirely. Such a request is difficult to obey, yet I cannot

refuse it without appearing unworthy of the respect you grant me.

If my absence can restore your tranquillity, I will submit to the sacrifice you demand.

However, allow me to confess one thing before I accept this exile.

When I first had the honour of meeting you, I admired your virtues as one admires a beautiful work of art. With time that admiration became deeper and more personal.

I discovered in you a goodness and sincerity that inspired me to become better myself. If my conduct has sometimes appeared bold, it is because the influence of your character awakened feelings that I had never known before.

Do not fear that I will disturb you again. From this moment I shall respect your wish and avoid every opportunity to see you.

Yet I cannot hide the sorrow I feel at losing the happiness of your presence.

Farewell, Madam. May your virtue always remain victorious.

Valmont

Letter 40

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, I must tell you of a new development in my affair with Madame de Tourvel.

She has written to me with a request that would amuse you greatly. In her letter she begs me to avoid her completely, because my presence disturbs the peace of mind that her virtue requires.

You can imagine the triumph hidden inside this apparent defeat.

When a woman asks a man to leave her in peace, it means that she already fears the power he has obtained over her thoughts.

I answered her with the most respectful submission. I promised to avoid her entirely and expressed regret for the trouble my presence had caused.

Such humility will produce exactly the effect I desire.

She will soon ask herself whether she has been unjust in demanding such a

sacrifice. Her generosity will persuade her to excuse me, and that excuse will open the door to renewed confidence.

In short, my retreat is only a new movement in the attack.

Meanwhile I read with great pleasure the letters of your young lovers. Their innocence is charming, though I suspect that your guidance will soon teach them more than they expect to learn.

Continue your lessons carefully. When I return to Paris, I shall wish to observe the progress of your pupil with my own eyes.

Farewell, my charming friend.

## Part 13

### Letter 41

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, I have read your last letter with the attention it deserves. Your retreat from Madame de Tourvel appears to me a very clever movement. When a woman asks a man to withdraw, she usually expects that he will resist. When he obeys instead, her curiosity and generosity soon begin to work in his favour.

I imagine that Madame de Tourvel now wonders whether she has been too severe. Her conscience will soon persuade her that justice requires some kindness toward you. At that moment the door you pretend to close will open again.

Continue therefore to appear obedient and respectful. Nothing confuses virtue more than humility in the person it fears.

While you conduct your campaign in the country, my own little drama in Paris becomes more animated.

Cecilia and Danceny now exchange letters regularly. Their affection grows stronger each day, though neither of them yet understands how far it may lead them. They still speak of friendship, respect, and admiration. Such words are very charming when written by two innocent hearts.

Yesterday Cecilia came to show me another letter from the Chevalier. She blushed deeply while I read it, and she asked me whether she should answer it at once or wait a day.

I advised patience, which increased her curiosity and her emotion at the same time. Nothing strengthens affection more than a short delay.

Danceney also writes to me from time to time, asking my opinion and thanking me for protecting their correspondence. You see how completely I direct the whole affair.

When Count Gercourt finally returns and prepares to marry his young bride, he will discover that her heart has already been educated by another master.

Such a lesson will be memorable.

Continue to inform me of every movement in your war with Madame de Tourvel. I confess that I await the final result with great impatience.

Farewell, my dear friend.

Letter 42

Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I must tell you of an event that has caused me both relief and reflection.

Some days ago I wrote to Mr. de Valmont asking him to avoid me entirely. I believed that such a request was necessary in order to preserve my tranquillity.

Yesterday I received his reply.

His letter was full of respect and submission. He accepted my request without complaint and even expressed regret that his presence had disturbed my peace of mind.

I confess that this response surprised me greatly.

I had expected some attempt to defend himself or perhaps to persuade me that my fears were exaggerated. Instead he showed a humility that I had not imagined possible.

Since reading his letter I find myself uncertain once again.

If he had behaved with pride or impatience, I would have felt justified in my caution. But his modest obedience makes me fear that I may have judged him too harshly.

Still, I must remain faithful to the principles that guide my life. I will therefore maintain the distance I requested, even though I now feel a certain regret.

Pray that I may not allow compassion to weaken the prudence that duty requires.

Your faithful friend,

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 43

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, each letter I receive from you increases both my happiness and my admiration. Your sincerity and modesty give a charm to your words that no art could imitate.

Yesterday evening I had the pleasure of seeing you again. The moments we spent together at the harpsichord seemed to pass far too quickly.

When our hands touched while turning the pages of the music, I felt such emotion that I hardly knew how to continue playing. I hope you did not notice my confusion.

After leaving your house I walked for a long time before returning home. I wished to prolong the happiness of that evening by remembering every word you had spoken.

Forgive me if I write too warmly. I know that prudence must guide our correspondence, and I promise that my respect for you will always remain greater than my desire to express my feelings.

Yet I cannot hide from you that those feelings grow stronger each day.

If the happiness of seeing you from time to time and exchanging these letters is all that destiny permits me, I will still consider myself fortunate.

With profound devotion,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 44

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has given me both pleasure and embarrassment.

Pleasure, because I am touched by the sincerity of your words. Embarrassment, because I do not know how to respond to sentiments that appear so warm.

When you say that our meetings bring you happiness, I must confess that I feel something similar. The moments we spend playing music together are always the most agreeable part of my day.

Yet I fear that I may say too much.

The Marchioness de Merteuil often reminds me that a young lady must speak with caution. She tells me that sincerity is a beautiful quality but that it must be guided by prudence.

I therefore ask you to forgive me if my letters appear less expressive than yours. It is not because I value your friendship less, but because I wish to follow the advice of those who are wiser than I am.

Believe that I appreciate the respect you show me and that I look forward to our next conversation with sincere pleasure.

With esteem,

Cecilia Volanges

Part 14

Letter 45

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My charming friend, events have taken the turn that I predicted. My respectful retreat has produced exactly the effect I desired.

Since my last letter, Madame de Tourvel has written again to Madame de Volanges. In that letter she expresses doubt about the severity of her judgment

against me. She now believes that my conduct may have been more honourable than she first supposed.

You see how easily virtue becomes generous when it believes itself just.

I have continued to avoid her carefully. When we meet by chance, I bow politely and pass without speaking. This behaviour confuses her more than the boldest declarations could have done.

Yesterday we encountered each other on the road near the village. She was walking with a servant, and I was riding toward the house of my aunt.

When she saw me approaching, she seemed uncertain whether to continue walking or to turn aside. I saluted her respectfully and rode past without attempting conversation.

As I passed, I noticed that she looked at me with an expression of surprise and perhaps even regret.

That moment alone was worth the effort of my restraint.

Believe me, my dear friend, the struggle in her heart grows stronger each day. Soon she will wish to speak with me again, and when that moment arrives, her own generosity will justify the weakness she fears.

Continue your education of the young Cecilia. I look forward to seeing the result of your lessons when I return to Paris.

Farewell.

Letter 46

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I hope you will forgive me for writing again after the request I made in my last letter.

Your obedience to that request has been so complete that it has caused me some embarrassment. When I asked you to avoid me, I believed that such distance would restore my tranquillity. Yet your immediate submission has produced the opposite effect.

Each time we meet by chance and you pass me with such respectful silence, I

feel as if I have been unjust.

I begin to fear that my suspicions were exaggerated and that I have treated you with unnecessary severity.

For that reason I wish to tell you that I do not expect you to avoid me with such strict care in the future. If circumstances bring us together in society, I see no reason why we should not speak with the same politeness that we show to others.

I hope that you will understand the spirit in which I write these words.

Believe that my only wish is to act with fairness.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 47

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has relieved the concern I felt since receiving your previous request.

I feared that my presence might truly disturb your peace of mind, and I therefore believed it my duty to obey your command without hesitation.

If my obedience has appeared excessive, I beg you to believe that it was inspired only by respect for your wishes.

Nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to know that you no longer regard my presence as a cause for uneasiness.

I accept with gratitude the permission you grant me to speak with you in society when circumstances permit. I promise that my conduct will always remain guided by the same respect that you have already observed.

Your opinion is too precious to me for me ever to risk losing it through imprudence.

With sincere devotion,

Valmont

Letter 48

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, I congratulate you.

The letter you received from Madame de Tourvel proves that your strategy has succeeded perfectly. She first asked you to withdraw; now she asks you to return. That change alone reveals the struggle that occupies her heart.

You see how easily virtue excuses the man it fears when he appears modest and obedient.

Continue to advance slowly. Each step must appear to come from her generosity rather than from your intention.

Meanwhile the progress of my own intrigue continues to amuse me greatly.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with more warmth than before, though she still believes herself entirely innocent. The poor Chevalier, for his part, is completely devoted to her.

Yesterday he wrote to me again, thanking me for protecting their correspondence. He calls me their “friend and guide.” Such confidence would almost make me feel guilty—if guilt were an emotion that interested me.

Soon their affection will grow strong enough to resist even the advice of prudence. When that moment arrives, I will decide how far the lesson should go.

You must admit that our two enterprises progress with equal elegance.

Continue to send me news of your virtuous lady. I am curious to know when her resistance will finally yield.

Farewell, my dear friend.

Part 15

Letter 49

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, since our last meeting I have wished many times to write to you, yet I hesitated because I feared that my letters might become too frequent. However, the happiness I feel when I receive even a few words from you gives me courage

to speak again.

Yesterday evening I returned home after seeing you, and I found myself unable to think of anything except the conversation we had near the harpsichord. When you spoke with such gentle sincerity, I felt that the world contained no greater happiness than that moment.

Forgive me if these words appear too warm. I know that prudence must guide us both. Yet I cannot hide from you the gratitude I feel for the kindness you have shown since answering my first letter.

Each day I admire more the modesty and goodness that distinguish your character. I often wonder whether I deserve the friendship you grant me.

When I think that another man may one day have the happiness of calling you his wife, I feel a sadness that I cannot entirely conceal. Yet I have no right to complain, and I promise that my respect for you will remain unchanged whatever destiny may decide.

If it is permitted, I shall continue to consider the moments we share as the most precious part of my life.

With devotion and respect,  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 50

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter moved me more than I can easily express.

When you speak of the happiness you feel in our conversations, I must confess that I experience something similar. Our meetings and our music together have become very dear to me.

Yet I cannot read your words without feeling a certain anxiety.

You say that another man may one day become my husband. That thought has also occurred to me, and it troubles me more than before. Until recently I believed that marriage was simply an arrangement decided by our parents. Now I begin to understand that the heart may have its own wishes.

I do not know whether it is right for me to write such thoughts.

The Marchioness de Merteuil tells me that sincerity is beautiful but that a young lady must always remain cautious. I try to follow her advice, yet sometimes my heart speaks more quickly than my reason.

If I have written too openly, I beg you to forgive me. I only wished to answer your letter with the same honesty that inspired it.

With esteem and friendship,

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 51

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, you were wise to show me the last letters you exchanged with the Chevalier Danceny. They reveal that your friendship has become stronger, and it is natural that such sentiments should begin to appear in your correspondence.

However, you must remember that feelings expressed too freely can easily lead to imprudence.

The Chevalier appears sincere, yet sincerity alone does not protect a young lady's reputation. Society judges actions without always understanding the motives that inspire them.

For that reason I advise you to moderate the warmth of your letters. Continue to answer him kindly, but avoid expressions that might be interpreted as promises.

In this way you will preserve both his esteem and your own tranquillity.

You may be certain that I will always guide you with the same care that I would give to a younger sister.

Trust me as you have done until now.

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 52

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the fortress of virtue begins to show clear signs of weakness.

Since Madame de Tourvel invited me to resume ordinary conversation, our meetings have become more frequent. Each time she speaks with me, she appears determined to maintain the calm dignity that she considers her duty.

Yet beneath that calm I perceive a growing agitation.

Yesterday we had a conversation that I must describe to you.

My aunt had invited several neighbours for tea. Madame de Tourvel was present. During the afternoon the conversation turned to the subject of generosity and charity.

Someone mentioned the assistance we had given to the poor family whose house burned down. Madame de Tourvel praised the kindness that had been shown to them.

At that moment my aunt said, "You must give the credit to Mr. de Valmont. He has done more than anyone."

I protested modestly and said that I had only followed the example of others. Madame de Tourvel looked at me with an expression of gratitude that she tried to hide.

Later, when we were alone for a moment near the window, she said quietly, "I begin to believe that I misunderstood you."

I answered, "Your opinion is too important to me for me ever to wish to deceive you."

She seemed deeply moved and did not reply.

That silence spoke more clearly than any declaration.

I assure you, my dear friend, the victory approaches.

Farewell.

Part 16

Letter 53

Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I feel the need to write to you again about the situation that has troubled me for some time.

Since my last letter, I have seen Mr. de Valmont several times in society. Our conversations have been polite and calm, and I must confess that his behaviour continues to surprise me.

He speaks with a modesty that seems sincere. His actions toward the poor people in the village have also shown a generosity that cannot easily be dismissed as mere appearance.

Because of these observations, I sometimes fear that my earlier judgment was unjust.

Yet at the same time I remain uneasy. I cannot forget the reputation that follows him in the world. A single man may possess both good and dangerous qualities.

I therefore continue to observe him carefully, hoping that time will reveal the truth.

What troubles me most is the effect that these reflections have upon my own thoughts. I wish to judge him with fairness, but I also wish to protect the peace of mind that my duty requires.

Pray that I may remain faithful to that duty.

Your sincere friend,

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 54

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, your last letter encouraged me to continue the path I had chosen, and I am pleased to tell you that the result becomes more evident each day.

Madame de Tourvel now speaks to me without the cold reserve that once marked her manner. On the contrary, she sometimes appears anxious to show me that she no longer distrusts me.

Yesterday provided an example that amused me greatly.

My aunt and several visitors were gathered in the salon when a discussion

began about acts of generosity. Madame de Tourvel spoke warmly about the duty of helping those who suffer.

I remained silent until someone mentioned the poor family whose house burned down. My aunt immediately praised the assistance I had given.

Madame de Tourvel looked at me with a mixture of gratitude and admiration that she tried unsuccessfully to conceal.

Later, when we spoke alone for a moment, she said, "I believe that I judged you too harshly."

Those words were spoken with such sincerity that I almost felt pity for her.

I answered with humility and assured her that her good opinion was the greatest reward I could receive.

At that moment she appeared deeply moved and remained silent for several seconds.

Believe me, my dear friend, the struggle in her heart is now visible. She wishes to continue believing in her own strength, yet she begins to admire the man she once feared.

That contradiction will soon lead her where I wish.

Continue your lessons with the young Cecilia and her poet. I imagine that their affection becomes more difficult to conceal each day.

Farewell.

## Letter 55

### The Chevalier Danceny to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I hope you will forgive me for writing again, but I feel that I must thank you for the kindness you continue to show to Mademoiselle de Volanges and to me.

Without your guidance our correspondence might easily have become imprudent. Your advice has allowed our friendship to grow while preserving the respect that her reputation deserves.

Each time I see Mademoiselle de Volanges, I admire more the sincerity and

modesty that distinguish her character. I cannot express how deeply I value the trust she places in me.

Yet I sometimes fear that my feelings may become too strong.

When I imagine that she may soon marry another man, my heart becomes heavy. I know that I have no right to oppose the wishes of her family, yet the thought of losing her presence causes me real pain.

I do not know whether it is wise for me to continue seeing her so often.

Because you understand her situation better than I do, I ask you to tell me frankly whether I should withdraw for a time in order to protect her reputation.

Whatever advice you give, I promise to follow it with respect.

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 56

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Chevalier Danceny

Chevalier, your letter proves once again the sincerity of your sentiments. The respect you show for Mademoiselle de Volanges honours both your character and hers.

You fear that your affection may become too strong. Such fear is natural when one discovers a heart worthy of admiration.

However, I do not believe that withdrawing from her company would produce the result you desire. Sudden absence might cause her unnecessary anxiety and could even appear strange to those who observe you.

Instead, I advise you to continue behaving exactly as you have done until now.

Speak with her in society, play music together, and write letters that express your esteem without exceeding the limits of prudence.

In this way your affection will remain honourable, and her reputation will remain protected.

Believe me, patience is often the most powerful ally of sincere feeling.

Continue to trust my guidance, and you will have no reason to regret it.

The Marchioness de Merteuil

## Part 17

### Letter 57

#### The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, I hesitate before writing this letter, yet I cannot remain silent after the conversation we had yesterday.

Your words have given me a happiness that I scarcely dare to believe. When you told me that you may have judged me too severely, I felt a gratitude that I cannot express completely.

For some time I have admired the strength and sincerity of your character. Your virtue inspired in me a respect that I had never felt before.

I feared that my admiration might disturb you, and for that reason I tried to obey your request for distance. Yet your recent kindness has encouraged me to hope that my presence no longer causes you uneasiness.

Believe me, Madam, that I value your esteem more than any other reward.

If my conduct has convinced you that my sentiments are sincere, I shall consider myself fortunate beyond measure.

Allow me therefore to continue enjoying the honour of your conversation whenever circumstances permit.

With the deepest respect,

Valmont

### Letter 58

#### Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I received your letter and must answer it with the same sincerity that inspired your words.

I confess that my opinion of you has changed since our first meetings. The conduct you have shown during the past weeks has revealed qualities that I did

not expect to find.

Your generosity toward those who suffer and the modesty with which you speak of your actions have persuaded me that I may have been unjust in my earlier suspicions.

Yet I must ask you to understand the difficulty of my situation.

I have always believed that a woman must guard her reputation carefully and avoid even the appearance of imprudence. For that reason I still fear that our conversations may attract attention.

I hope that you will help me preserve the dignity that my position requires.

If we continue to meet in society, let it always be with the calm respect that you have shown until now.

Believe that I appreciate the sincerity of your sentiments and that I wish to judge you with fairness.

Madame de Tourvel

## Letter 59

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letters you have sent me confirm what I expected from the beginning: Madame de Tourvel now stands at the point where admiration begins to resemble affection.

Her last letter reveals clearly the struggle that occupies her heart. She praises your virtues, excuses your conduct, and asks only that you protect her reputation.

In other words, she already trusts you.

That trust is the most dangerous moment for a woman who believes herself strong. Once she begins to believe in the honour of the man she fears, she no longer sees the danger he represents.

Continue therefore to speak with humility and respect. Do not hurry the conclusion of your enterprise. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more painful her final defeat will become.

As for my own intrigue, it progresses exactly as I desire.

Cecilia and Danceny now write to each other with increasing warmth. Their letters remain modest in appearance, but the sentiments they express become more evident.

Yesterday Cecilia confessed to me that she sometimes feels unhappy when she remembers that her marriage with Count Gercourt has already been arranged.

Such reflections are very encouraging.

Continue your campaign with patience, my dear Viscount. Our two enterprises promise equal success.

Farewell.

Letter 60

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I must write to you today because my heart feels troubled.

Yesterday my mother spoke again of the marriage that she has arranged for me with Count Gercourt. Until now I had listened to such conversations without thinking very deeply about them.

But since our friendship has grown, the idea of that marriage has begun to disturb me.

When I imagine that I may soon belong to a man whom I hardly know, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily explain.

At the same time I ask myself whether it is wrong to feel this sadness. My mother believes that the marriage will make me happy, and I know that a daughter should respect the wishes of her family.

Yet when I think of you, my heart tells me something different.

I do not know whether I should have written these words. Perhaps they are imprudent. But I felt that silence would be even more painful.

Please forgive me if I have spoken too openly.

Cecilia Volanges

Part 18

Letter 61

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has moved me more deeply than any I have received before. The sincerity of your words touched my heart with both joy and sorrow.

Joy, because you trusted me enough to speak openly of your feelings. Sorrow, because the situation you describe reminds me how little power I possess to change the destiny that others have arranged for you.

When you say that the thought of your marriage to Count Gercourt troubles you, I cannot hide that this confession both consoles and pains me. It consoles me because it proves that I am not indifferent to you. Yet it pains me because I fear that nothing I do can prevent the separation that such a marriage would impose.

Believe me, Madam, I would rather suffer in silence than cause you the smallest difficulty. Your happiness must always remain more important to me than my own desires.

If destiny decides that you must belong to another, I will accept that decision with respect. But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Each moment I spend near you, each letter I receive from you, becomes a memory that I will never forget.

With devotion and respect,  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 62

Cecilia Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear Madam, I must once again ask for your advice, because I feel more confused than ever.

As you know, my correspondence with the Chevalier Danceny has continued. His letters are always respectful and sincere, yet they express a tenderness that

affects me deeply.

Yesterday I wrote to him about the marriage my mother has arranged for me. I confessed that the thought of it made me unhappy.

After sending that letter, I began to fear that I had been too open. Perhaps a young lady should not speak so freely about her feelings.

Yet it seemed impossible for me to remain silent.

The Chevalier answered me with great generosity. He wrote that my happiness must always come before his own wishes and that he would accept any destiny that separated us.

Those words moved me greatly. At the same time they made me even more aware of the difficulty of our situation.

I do not know whether it is right for us to continue writing to each other. Sometimes I feel that these letters bring me happiness. At other moments I fear that they may lead me toward imprudence.

Please tell me honestly what I should do.

Your advice has always guided me wisely, and I trust it completely.

Cecilia Volanges

## Letter 63

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, your letter reveals the sincerity of your heart, but it also shows how little experience you yet possess in matters of the world.

The feelings you describe are not unusual. When two young people discover that they enjoy each other's company, it is natural that their friendship should grow warmer with time.

However, you must remember that circumstances sometimes place limits upon our wishes.

Your mother has arranged a marriage that she believes advantageous for you. Until that plan changes, you must act with the greatest prudence.

I do not advise you to break your correspondence with the Chevalier Danceny

entirely. Such a sudden separation might cause unnecessary pain and could even excite suspicion.

Instead, continue writing to him with the same modest tone that has guided your letters until now. Avoid expressions that might appear too passionate, and always remember that your reputation must remain above every doubt.

If the future should change your situation, then your feelings may perhaps be considered more freely. Until that moment arrives, patience and discretion must guide your conduct.

Trust me to help you judge each step wisely.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

#### Letter 64

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, I believe that the moment we have awaited approaches rapidly.

Madame de Tourvel now treats me with a confidence that would have been impossible only a few weeks ago. She speaks openly with me and often seeks my opinion during conversation.

Yesterday we had a meeting that deserves particular attention.

My aunt had left the room for a short time, and Madame de Tourvel and I found ourselves alone near the window. For several moments she remained silent, as if she wished to speak but hesitated.

At last she said, "Mr. de Valmont, I hope that you will never take advantage of the confidence I have begun to feel in your character."

Such a request could not have been more favourable to my design.

I answered with the most respectful seriousness that nothing in the world could persuade me to abuse the trust she placed in me.

She seemed relieved by my reply and spoke afterward with even greater openness.

When she left the room, I could see clearly that her heart now struggles between

admiration and fear.

Believe me, my dear friend, the victory is near.

Continue directing the innocent Cecilia and her poet. When I return to Paris, I hope to find your pupil fully prepared for the destiny you have chosen for her.

Farewell.

## Part 19

### Letter 65

Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I must once again confide in you, because my thoughts have become increasingly troubled.

During the past days I have spoken several times with Mr. de Valmont. His behaviour continues to be guided by a respect that I cannot deny. He listens to my opinions with attention and answers with a sincerity that appears genuine.

I confess that this conduct has changed my feelings toward him.

At first I believed that the safest course was to avoid him entirely. Now I begin to fear that such avoidance may have been unjust. When a person shows kindness and modesty, it seems wrong to respond with cold distrust.

Yet I also know that appearances can deceive.

I therefore remain uncertain how to act.

When I speak with him, I feel both admiration and uneasiness. His words reveal a character that seems generous, yet my memory reminds me of the reputation that once caused me to fear him.

This struggle between trust and caution disturbs my peace of mind more than I expected.

I pray that reason and duty will continue to guide me.

Your faithful friend,

Madame de Tourvel

## Letter 66

### The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, I cannot conceal the emotion I felt after our last conversation.

When you told me that you hoped I would never abuse the confidence you have begun to feel in me, I realized how precious your opinion has become.

There are moments when I ask myself whether I deserve the esteem you grant me. In truth, your example has awakened in me sentiments that I did not believe myself capable of experiencing.

Your virtue commands admiration from everyone who observes it. For me it has become something even more powerful: it has inspired a desire to be worthy of your respect.

If my conduct has persuaded you that I am sincere, I consider that success greater than any other ambition.

Believe me, Madam, that I would rather renounce every pleasure in the world than risk losing the good opinion you now hold of me.

With profound respect,

Valmont

## Letter 67

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letters you describe reveal that Madame de Tourvel has reached the most interesting stage of the struggle.

She now admires the very qualities that once made her suspicious. That transformation shows how deeply your conduct has influenced her judgment.

When a woman begins to praise a man's virtue, she prepares herself to excuse his weaknesses.

Continue therefore with the same patience that has brought you this far. The moment when admiration becomes affection is often so gentle that the person who experiences it does not immediately recognize the change.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances with equal promise.

Cecilia now speaks of Danceny with a warmth that she once feared to express. She confesses to me that the idea of her marriage to Count Gercourt has become painful.

Yet she still believes that I guide her only for her happiness.

Such innocence is very useful.

Soon the attachment between the two young lovers will become strong enough that prudence alone will no longer restrain them. When that moment arrives, the lesson will finally begin.

Continue to send me news of your conquest. I confess that I am curious to know which of us will first reach the conclusion of our enterprise.

Farewell.

Letter 68

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, since receiving your last letter I have thought constantly about the situation in which we find ourselves.

You told me that the idea of your marriage troubles you. Those words have remained in my mind, and they give me both hope and fear.

Hope, because they show that my affection is not entirely indifferent to you. Fear, because I know that the wishes of your family may soon separate us.

I would never dare to oppose the authority of your mother. Yet I cannot hide the sadness that fills my heart when I imagine the day when you may belong to another.

If there were any honourable means by which I could prove the sincerity of my devotion, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until such a moment arrives, I must be content with the happiness that your letters bring me.

Believe that my respect and admiration will never change.

With devotion,

## Chevalier Danceny

### Part 20

#### Letter 69

##### Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has caused me both happiness and anxiety.

Happiness, because I see how sincere your feelings are. Anxiety, because I begin to fear that our affection may lead us into difficulties that I do not know how to avoid.

When you speak of the sadness you feel at the thought of my marriage, I cannot pretend that those words leave me indifferent. On the contrary, they make me realize more clearly how painful that future may become.

Yet I do not know how we could change the situation.

My mother believes that this marriage will bring me happiness and honour. She has already spoken of it as if it were certain. I do not have the courage to oppose her wishes.

At the same time I cannot hide from you that my heart becomes heavy whenever I imagine that our friendship must end.

Perhaps I should not have written these words. But silence seemed even more painful.

If I have spoken imprudently, I ask you to forgive me.

Cecilia Volanges

#### Letter 70

##### The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, the sincerity of your last letter has touched me deeply.

When you say that the thought of our separation causes you pain, you give me a happiness that I scarcely dared to hope for. Yet this happiness is accompanied

by a sorrow that I cannot conceal.

I respect the wishes of your family, and I know that honour requires obedience to them. But I cannot persuade my heart to remain indifferent when I think of losing you.

If destiny decides that such a sacrifice must be made, I will accept it with resignation. Yet until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the affection that has grown between us.

Your letters are the greatest consolation that I possess. Each one reminds me that the sentiments I feel are not entirely unreturned.

Whatever the future may bring, I will always remember the kindness and sincerity that have made you so dear to me.

With respect and devotion,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 71

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, I have read the letters you exchanged with the Chevalier Danceny, and I understand the difficulty of your situation.

The affection that has grown between you is natural and sincere. Yet you must remember that circumstances sometimes require patience and restraint.

Your mother's plan for your marriage has not yet changed. Until it does, you must continue to behave with the greatest prudence.

Do not allow your correspondence to become too passionate. The world judges appearances quickly, and even innocent sentiments can create scandal if they are expressed without caution.

Continue therefore to write with the same modest tone that you have used until now. In that way you will preserve both the Chevalier's esteem and your own reputation.

Trust me to guide you through these difficulties.

Your affectionate friend,

## The Marchioness de Merteuil

### Letter 72

#### The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, I believe that the conclusion of my enterprise approaches rapidly.

Madame de Tourvel now speaks to me with a confidence that she would once have considered impossible. Her admiration for the qualities she believes she has discovered in my character grows stronger each day.

Yesterday we had a conversation that reveals clearly the progress I have made.

We were speaking of virtue and duty when she suddenly said, "Mr. de Valmont, I hope that you will always remain the man I believe you to be."

Such words contain more trust than she realizes.

I answered with humility and assured her that her good opinion was the most precious reward I could receive.

She appeared deeply moved and remained silent for several moments.

Believe me, my dear friend, the fortress of virtue stands very close to surrender.

Continue to guide the young Cecilia with your usual skill. When I return to Paris, I expect that our two intrigues will provide us with equal satisfaction.

Farewell.

### Part 21

### Letter 73

#### Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must speak to you with a frankness that I have tried for a long time to avoid.

During the past weeks our conversations have become more frequent, and I feel that silence would now be dangerous for us both.

You have often told me that my opinion is precious to you. If that is truly the case, then you must allow me to speak openly about the concern that troubles me.

I begin to fear that the confidence I have shown you may expose me to criticism. The world judges appearances quickly, and people do not always understand the intentions that guide our actions.

For that reason I believe it would be wise for us to limit our conversations in the future.

Do not think that this request comes from distrust. On the contrary, it is precisely because I now believe in your honour that I feel able to speak so openly.

I know that you will understand the motives that guide my decision.

Believe that I write these words with sincere regret.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 74

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has caused me deep sorrow, yet I cannot refuse the request you make.

If our conversations expose you to criticism, then my first duty must be to protect the reputation that you value so highly.

Believe me when I say that nothing in the world would persuade me to risk the respect that you deserve.

Yet before I obey your wish, allow me to confess one truth that I have long tried to conceal.

The admiration I first felt for your virtue has gradually become something stronger. Your goodness, your sincerity, and the calm dignity of your character have inspired in me a sentiment that I can no longer deny.

I would never have dared to reveal this feeling if you had not spoken of confidence and honour.

Do not fear that this confession will disturb your peace. I know too well the principles that guide your life to expect any encouragement.

I only wished to speak with sincerity before accepting the silence you demand.

Farewell, Madam. Whatever happens in the future, I will always remember the respect you have inspired in me.

Valmont

Letter 75

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has placed me in a state of agitation that I scarcely know how to describe.

I asked you to reduce our conversations in order to protect the tranquillity that my duty requires. Instead, your reply has revealed sentiments that I had hoped never to hear.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the respect you express. Yet the confession you have made forces me to see our situation more clearly than before.

You know that I am married and that my honour obliges me to remain faithful to the vows I have taken. Even if I were free, the principles that guide my life would forbid me to encourage feelings that might lead to weakness.

I therefore beg you once again to help me preserve the peace of mind that both of us must desire.

Let us end the conversation that has become so dangerous.

Believe that I will always remember the respect you have shown me, but also believe that duty must remain stronger than every other sentiment.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 76

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the moment I promised you approaches rapidly.

Yesterday I received a letter from Madame de Tourvel that reveals the violence of the struggle now taking place in her heart.

She begs me once again to end our conversations, yet her words show clearly that my confession has affected her deeply.

When a woman writes with such agitation, it means that the resistance she invokes has already begun to weaken.

I will obey her request for the moment. A short silence will increase her uncertainty and force her to reflect more seriously on the sentiments she now tries to reject.

Believe me, my dear friend, the victory will soon be complete.

Continue to guide the young Cecilia and her devoted poet. Their innocence must provide you with great amusement.

Farewell.

## Part 22

### Letter 77

#### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, your last letter confirms that your virtuous lady has reached the point where reason struggles helplessly against feeling.

Her agitation after your confession proves that the words you spoke have produced exactly the effect we expected. When a woman insists on silence after hearing such a declaration, she does not escape the danger; she only continues the conversation within her own heart.

Your decision to obey her request for a time is therefore very wise. Absence will oblige her to reflect upon the sentiments she wishes to suppress. Reflection often weakens the very resolutions it intends to strengthen.

Continue therefore with the same patience. When she begins to regret the silence she demanded, she will herself reopen the path that leads to her defeat.

Meanwhile my own intrigue continues to advance pleasantly.

Cecilia and Danceny now speak of each other with a tenderness that they can scarcely conceal. The poor girl tries to appear prudent, but each letter she writes

reveals how deeply her heart has become involved.

Yesterday she told me that she feels unhappy whenever she thinks of the marriage her mother has arranged. Such reflections are very useful.

Soon the conflict between duty and affection will become too strong for her inexperience to control.

I shall then decide how far the lesson must go.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final chapter of your conquest with great curiosity.

Letter 78

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, several days have passed since I last wrote to you, and the silence has seemed very long to me.

I hesitated to write again because I feared that my letters might trouble you. Yet the absence of your words has made me realize how important they have become to my happiness.

Each day I ask myself whether I have acted imprudently by expressing my feelings too openly. If that is the case, I beg you to forgive me.

Believe that my respect for you remains unchanged.

I would rather remain silent forever than cause you the smallest anxiety. Yet if it is permitted, allow me to continue writing to you as a friend who values your esteem above everything else.

Your letters have brought me a happiness that I cannot easily abandon.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 79

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I am grateful for your last letter and must confess that your silence had

begun to trouble me.

When several days passed without hearing from you, I feared that perhaps you had decided to end our correspondence in order to avoid the difficulties we discussed.

Such a thought caused me real sadness.

I know that prudence must guide us, yet the friendship that has grown between us has become very dear to me.

When I imagine that our letters might suddenly cease, I feel a loneliness that reminds me of the days when I first left the convent and found myself without companions.

I hope that our correspondence may continue with the same respect and sincerity that have guided it until now.

If these words appear too open, I ask you to forgive me.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 80

Madame de Tourvel to Madame de Volanges

My dear friend, I write to you today in a state of great agitation.

Mr. de Valmont has confessed to me sentiments that I had long feared but hoped never to hear.

His declaration was expressed with such respect and sincerity that I cannot easily condemn it. Yet the very sincerity of his words has increased the danger of the situation.

I have begged him to end our conversations in order to protect the tranquillity that my duty requires. He has promised to respect my request.

Yet since that moment my thoughts have been filled with uncertainty.

I ask myself whether my conduct has been sufficiently firm, whether my silence may be interpreted as weakness, and whether I have already allowed this acquaintance to become too important in my mind.

I pray constantly for the strength to resist every temptation that might disturb

the peace of my conscience.

Pray for me also, my dear friend.

Madame de Tourvel

## Part 23

### Letter 81

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the situation develops exactly as I expected.

Since my last letter I have strictly obeyed the request of Madame de Tourvel. I have avoided every opportunity to see her, and when chance brings us near each other, I behave as if I fear disturbing her.

This obedience has produced the effect I predicted.

Yesterday my aunt told me that Madame de Tourvel appeared unusually thoughtful during her visit. She asked several questions about me and seemed surprised to learn that I had avoided the house for several days.

You see how quickly absence awakens curiosity.

My aunt also told her that I had spoken with regret of the uneasiness my presence had caused her. Such information could only increase the compassion she already feels.

I expect that before long she will find some pretext to renew our conversation herself.

When that moment arrives, her generosity will justify the weakness she wishes to avoid.

Believe me, my dear friend, the victory is now only a matter of time.

Farewell.

### Letter 82

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must write to you once again, although I fear that doing so may appear inconsistent after the request I made in my last letter.

During the past days I have noticed your absence from the house of your aunt, and I cannot hide that this absence has caused me some concern.

When I asked you to reduce our conversations, I hoped only to avoid the appearance of imprudence. I did not intend to deprive you of the ordinary visits that friendship and politeness permit.

If my words led you to believe that you must avoid me entirely, I beg you to understand that such severity was not my intention.

I hope that you will resume your visits as before and that we may continue to meet with the same calm respect that has guided our conversations until now.

Believe that I write these words only in the spirit of fairness.

Madame de Tourvel

#### Letter 83

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has filled me with gratitude.

I feared that my presence might truly disturb the tranquillity you value so highly, and I therefore believed it my duty to withdraw completely.

If my absence has caused you any concern, I regret it sincerely.

Your permission to resume my visits gives me a happiness that I will always remember. I promise that my conduct will continue to be guided by the respect that you have already observed.

Your good opinion remains the greatest reward I could desire.

With profound respect,

Valmont

#### Letter 84

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, your last letter has amused me greatly.

You see now how perfectly your strategy has succeeded. Madame de Tourvel first asked you to avoid her; now she writes to complain of your absence.

Such contradictions reveal the true state of her heart.

She believes that she acts only from fairness, yet she does not perceive that compassion and curiosity already guide her conduct.

Continue therefore to behave with the same respectful moderation. Each step she takes toward you will appear to her the result of her own generosity rather than your influence.

Meanwhile my own intrigue reaches an equally interesting moment.

Cecilia now admits openly that the thought of her marriage to Count Gercourt causes her sorrow. Danceny, for his part, becomes more devoted each day.

Their letters grow longer, and their affection becomes more difficult to disguise.

Soon the innocence that has protected them until now will no longer be sufficient to restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, I shall decide how far their lesson must go.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final triumph of your conquest.

## Part 24

### Letter 85

#### The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, I cannot describe the happiness I felt when I received your last letter. Your words removed the anxiety that had troubled me during the days of silence.

When you told me that my absence had caused you sadness, I felt that my devotion had not been entirely useless. Those simple words have given me more joy than the most passionate declaration could have done.

Yet I must also confess that your letter made me reflect more seriously on our situation.

Each day our affection grows stronger, and each day the obstacles that separate

us appear more difficult to overcome. I know that the wishes of your family must be respected, and I would never dare to oppose them openly.

Still, when I imagine the moment when your marriage to Count Gercourt may separate us forever, my heart becomes heavy with sorrow.

Forgive me if these thoughts appear too sad. I only wish to be sincere with you, just as you have been sincere with me.

Whatever the future may bring, I will always remember the kindness and trust that you have shown me.

With devotion and respect,  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 86

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your letter has moved me deeply.

When you speak of the sadness you feel at the thought of our separation, I cannot hide that I feel the same pain. Our conversations and our letters have become the happiest part of my life.

Yet the more our affection grows, the more uncertain I become about what we should do.

My mother believes that the marriage she has arranged will bring me honour and happiness. I do not have the courage to oppose her wishes, and I know that a daughter must respect the authority of her family.

But when I think of losing the friendship that has united us, my heart becomes filled with sorrow.

I often ask myself whether destiny might change the future that others have prepared for us. Yet I do not know whether such hope is reasonable.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent. I only wished to speak honestly about the feelings that trouble me.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 87

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, I have read the letters you exchanged with the Chevalier Danceny, and I see clearly how difficult your situation has become.

The affection that now exists between you is sincere, yet it must be guided carefully if it is not to lead you into imprudence.

You must remember that the world judges appearances more quickly than intentions. A young lady who allows her feelings to become too visible may easily attract criticism.

Continue therefore to write to the Chevalier with the same modest tone that has protected you until now. Express esteem and friendship, but avoid words that might appear too passionate.

If destiny should later change the circumstances that now separate you, then your feelings may perhaps be expressed more freely.

Until that moment arrives, patience and prudence must guide your conduct.

Trust me always to advise you for your own happiness.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 88

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the conclusion of my enterprise approaches with a certainty that leaves me little doubt about the final result.

Madame de Tourvel now seeks my company with a confidence that she once believed impossible. Each time we meet, her manner reveals both admiration and uneasiness.

Yesterday we had a conversation that demonstrates the progress I have made.

We were speaking of moral duties when she suddenly said, "Mr. de Valmont, I believe that your character has been greatly misunderstood."

Such a declaration would have been unthinkable only a short time ago.

I answered with modest gratitude and assured her that her good opinion was more valuable to me than any praise from the world.

She seemed deeply moved and spoke afterward with a warmth that she tried unsuccessfully to conceal.

Believe me, my dear friend, the resistance of virtue becomes weaker each day.

Soon the struggle that now troubles her heart will reach its inevitable conclusion.

Continue to watch the progress of your young lovers. When I return to Paris, I hope that our two intrigues will provide us with equal satisfaction.

Farewell.

## Part 25

### Letter 89

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must write to you again, although I fear that my letters only increase the confusion of my thoughts.

During the past days we have spoken several times, and each conversation has left me more troubled than before. I wished to believe that the respect you show would allow us to maintain a calm and reasonable friendship.

Yet I now realize that such hope may have been an illusion.

Your presence affects me more than I had imagined possible. Even when I am alone, I find myself remembering our conversations and repeating your words in my mind.

Such reflections frighten me.

I know that my duty requires me to preserve the peace of mind that has always guided my life. Yet the more I struggle to forget these thoughts, the more persistent they become.

I beg you therefore to help me once more.

If you truly value the respect that I have shown you, you must avoid every conversation that might increase this dangerous agitation.

Believe that I ask this with sincere regret.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 90

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has filled me with emotion.

When you confess that my presence troubles your thoughts, I feel both sorrow and gratitude. Sorrow, because I would never wish to disturb the tranquillity you value so highly. Gratitude, because your sincerity reveals the importance that our conversations have acquired in your mind.

Believe me when I say that I admire the strength with which you struggle against feelings that you consider dangerous.

Yet I must also confess that those same feelings have become the happiness of my life.

Since the day I first admired your virtue, my respect for you has grown into a sentiment that I can no longer conceal from myself. Your goodness and sincerity have awakened in me a devotion that no other person has ever inspired.

I know that such sentiments must appear impossible to you. Yet I could not allow your letter to remain unanswered without speaking the truth that fills my heart.

Whatever decision you make, I will respect it completely.

With the deepest respect,

Valmont

Letter 91

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has left me in a state of agitation that I can scarcely describe.

I hoped that by speaking openly about my fears I might restore the calm that once guided my thoughts. Instead your reply has revealed feelings that make that calm even more difficult to preserve.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the respect you express. Yet the sentiment you describe is one that I must reject with all the strength of my conscience.

You know that I am bound by vows that cannot be broken. My honour and my duty require me to remain faithful to them.

Even if those vows did not exist, the principles that guide my life would forbid me to encourage a passion that could lead only to sorrow.

I therefore beg you once more to end the conversation that has become so dangerous for both of us.

Let us return to the distance that alone can protect the tranquillity of our lives.

Madame de Tourvel

## Letter 92

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the letters I have just received from Madame de Tourvel show that the decisive moment approaches.

She now confesses openly that my presence troubles her thoughts. Such an admission would have been impossible only a short time ago.

Her words reveal the violence of the struggle that now occupies her heart. She invokes duty and honour, yet she cannot hide the agitation that my declarations have produced.

I will continue to behave with the same respectful moderation that has guided my conduct until now. Each new effort she makes to resist will only increase the power of the sentiment she fears.

Believe me, my dear friend, the fortress of virtue now trembles.

Continue to observe the progress of your young lovers. Their innocence must still provide you with much amusement.

Farewell.

## Part 26

### Letter 93

#### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letters you describe leave little doubt about the state of Madame de Tourvel's heart. When a woman confesses that a man disturbs her thoughts, she has already advanced further than she imagines.

She still invokes duty and honour, but these words now serve only to justify the struggle she experiences. The more she insists on resistance, the more clearly she reveals the strength of the feeling she fears.

Continue therefore with the patience that has brought you so near to success. Every effort she makes to defend herself will only weaken her resolution.

Meanwhile the progress of my own intrigue approaches an equally interesting moment.

Cecilia now admits that her affection for Danceny has become stronger than her fear of imprudence. She speaks of him with a tenderness that she once tried carefully to conceal.

Yesterday she told me that the thought of her marriage to Count Gercourt fills her with sadness. I encouraged her to remain calm and prudent, but such advice now produces less effect than before.

Danceny, for his part, becomes more devoted each day. His letters grow longer and more passionate, though he still tries to preserve the appearance of respect.

Soon the innocence that has protected them until now will no longer be strong enough to restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final result of your enterprise with great curiosity.

### Letter 94

## The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, I have read your last letter many times since receiving it. Each time I discover in your words the same sincerity that first inspired my admiration.

You say that the future prepared by your family troubles you. Believe me, those words have remained constantly in my thoughts.

I know that honour requires obedience to the wishes of those who guide your life. Yet I cannot hide from you that the idea of losing your presence causes me a sorrow that grows deeper each day.

If there were any honourable means by which I could prove the sincerity of my devotion, I would embrace it without hesitation.

I ask myself whether silence and patience are the only paths that remain open to us.

Yet even in this uncertainty I feel gratitude for the friendship that unites us. Your letters have brought a happiness into my life that I will always remember.

Whatever destiny may decide, my admiration for you will never change.

With respect and devotion,

Chevalier Danceny

## Letter 95

### Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter touched me deeply.

When you speak of the sorrow you feel at the thought of our separation, I cannot deny that I experience the same pain. Our friendship has become so dear to me that the idea of losing it seems almost unbearable.

Yet the situation in which we find ourselves leaves me uncertain how to act.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged, and I know that she believes it will secure my happiness. I do not have the courage to oppose her wishes openly.

At the same time I cannot pretend that my heart accepts this future with

indifference.

Often I ask myself whether it is possible that destiny might change the plans that others have made for us. Yet I do not know whether such hope is reasonable.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent. I only wished to answer your sincerity with the same honesty.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 96

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled me with both admiration and sorrow.

Admiration, because it reveals once again the strength of the principles that guide your life. Sorrow, because those same principles appear to condemn the sentiment that has become the happiness of my existence.

You ask me to return to the distance that once protected your tranquillity. I will obey this request if such obedience can restore your peace of mind.

Yet before withdrawing once more, allow me to confess the truth that I can no longer conceal.

The admiration I first felt for your virtue has become a passion that governs every thought of my life. Your goodness, your sincerity, and the dignity of your character have awakened in me feelings that I had never believed myself capable of experiencing.

I know that such a confession must appear impossible to you. Yet silence would now be a form of deception, and I would rather risk your displeasure than hide the truth.

Whatever decision you make, I will respect it completely.

With profound devotion,

Valmont

Part 27

Letter 97

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I have received your last letter, and I cannot hide the agitation it has caused me.

Your words are sincere and respectful, yet the sentiment you express places me in a situation that I do not know how to escape.

I believed that distance would protect both of us from the danger I feared. Instead your declaration has made that distance more painful than before.

I struggle constantly between the duty that guides my life and the emotion that your presence awakens in my heart.

Each time I repeat to myself the principles that have always governed my conduct. Yet the more I try to silence my thoughts, the more they return with new force.

I fear that I no longer possess the strength I once believed unshakable.

Do not think that I write these words lightly. The confession I make to you fills me with shame and anxiety.

I beg you therefore to show generosity toward the weakness that I cannot entirely conceal.

Help me restore the calm that my conscience demands.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 98

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your letter has moved me more deeply than any words I have ever received.

When you confess that my presence awakens emotions you cannot easily control, you reveal a sincerity that fills me with both admiration and gratitude.

Believe me, I would never wish to abuse the confidence that such a confession places in my hands.

If my devotion has troubled the peace of your heart, I ask only that you allow me to prove that it is worthy of your respect.

The sentiment that inspires me is not a passing desire but a sincere admiration that has become the guiding passion of my life.

Your virtue first commanded my respect; your sincerity has now won my heart entirely.

I ask nothing from you except the permission to continue loving you with the same respect and devotion that your character inspires.

If my affection must remain silent, it will still remain faithful.

Valmont

Letter 99

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letter you describe from Madame de Tourvel proves that your victory is now almost certain.

When a woman confesses that she fears her own weakness, she has already advanced much further than she intends to admit.

Her conscience still speaks loudly, but her heart has begun to answer with equal strength. Such a conflict rarely ends in favour of reason.

Continue therefore with the same patience that has guided you until now. Do not hurry the conclusion of the drama. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more complete her surrender will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances toward a decisive moment.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a warmth that she can scarcely disguise. The poor girl believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, grows more passionate each day. His devotion to her has become the central interest of his life.

Soon their affection will reach the point where prudence will no longer restrain them.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I look forward with equal impatience to the conclusion of your conquest.

Letter 100

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has confirmed the sincerity of the feelings that unite us.

When you confess that the thought of our separation causes you pain, I feel both happiness and sorrow. Happiness, because I see that my affection is not entirely unreturned. Sorrow, because the future that awaits us may soon destroy the happiness we now share.

I know that honour requires obedience to the wishes of your family. Yet I cannot persuade my heart to accept calmly the thought of losing you.

If there were any honourable means by which I could hope for a different future, I would embrace it with all my strength.

Until that moment arrives, I must content myself with the happiness that your letters bring me.

Believe that my admiration and devotion will remain unchanged whatever destiny decides.

Chevalier Danceny

Part 28

Letter 101

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have read your last letter with an emotion that I can scarcely describe.

Each time you speak of the sorrow that our separation may cause, I feel the same sadness in my own heart. Our friendship has become so dear to me that the thought of losing it seems almost unbearable.

Yet I know that the future of my life has been arranged by others, and I do not know how to change what has already been decided.

Sometimes I ask myself whether it is wrong for me to continue writing to you when such obstacles exist. But when I imagine that our letters might suddenly cease, I feel a loneliness that frightens me.

You have become the person to whom I speak most sincerely, and the thought of silence between us seems impossible to accept.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent. I only wished to answer your sincerity with the same honesty.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 102

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has confirmed the hope that I scarcely dared to express.

When you say that silence between us would cause you sorrow, you give me a happiness that I cannot easily describe.

Yet I must also confess that the more I think of our situation, the more difficult it becomes for me to accept the destiny that threatens to separate us.

I respect the authority of your mother and the customs that govern society. But my heart refuses to believe that such obstacles must inevitably destroy the affection that has united us.

If there were any honourable means to defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until such a moment arrives, I must continue to cherish every letter you send me as the most precious gift I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 103

The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, I have read the letters you exchanged with the Chevalier Danceny, and I see clearly that your affection has grown stronger than before.

Such feelings are natural between two young people who enjoy each other's company. Yet you must remember that circumstances require you to act with the greatest prudence.

Your mother's plan for your marriage has not changed, and until it does, you must avoid every action that could compromise your reputation.

Continue therefore to write to the Chevalier with the same modest tone that has guided your correspondence until now.

Express esteem and friendship, but avoid words that might appear too passionate.

If the future should one day free you from the obligations that now bind you, then your feelings may perhaps be expressed more openly.

Until that moment arrives, patience must remain your best guide.

Trust me always to advise you with the same care that I have shown from the beginning.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 104

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has remained constantly in my thoughts.

When you confess the struggle that now occupies your heart, I feel both admiration and sorrow. Admiration for the sincerity that guided your words, and sorrow because I know that the same sincerity forces you to resist the sentiment that unites us.

Believe me when I say that my devotion remains unchanged.

The admiration I first felt for your virtue has become a passion that governs every moment of my life. Your goodness and dignity have awakened in me

feelings that I once believed impossible.

Yet I would rather renounce every hope than disturb the peace of your conscience.

If my presence continues to trouble you, I will withdraw once more and leave you the tranquillity that your duty demands.

But before doing so, allow me to repeat that my respect and devotion will remain constant, whatever distance may separate us.

Valmont

## Part 29

### Letter 105

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has touched me more deeply than I had believed possible.

When you speak of withdrawing in order to preserve the tranquillity of my conscience, I cannot hide the gratitude that such generosity inspires in me.

Yet at the same time I feel a sadness that I struggle to explain.

I ask myself whether the distance I demand truly restores the calm I once possessed. Instead of forgetting our conversations, I find that my thoughts return to them with even greater insistence.

Your respect and sincerity have made it impossible for me to regard you with indifference.

I fear that my weakness may become visible if I continue to write in this manner.

Forgive me if my words appear confused. I no longer know how to reconcile the duty that guides my life with the emotions that disturb it.

I beg you once more to help me preserve the strength that I now feel slipping away.

Madame de Tourvel

### Letter 106

## The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, the sincerity of your last letter has filled me with a happiness that I scarcely dare to admit.

When you confess that my absence does not restore your tranquillity, you reveal a sentiment that I had hoped but never expected to hear so openly.

Believe me, I would never wish to take advantage of the confidence you have shown.

Yet I cannot deny that the affection I feel for you has become the most powerful emotion of my life.

From the first moment I admired your virtue, I felt that your character possessed a nobility that commanded my respect. With time that admiration has grown into a devotion that I cannot conceal.

If such a sentiment must remain without hope, I will accept that destiny. But I could not remain silent after reading the confession you have made.

Whatever decision you take, my respect and admiration will remain unchanged.  
Valmont

## Letter 107

### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letters you describe reveal clearly that the moment of surrender approaches.

Madame de Tourvel now confesses that distance does not free her from the thoughts you have awakened. Such an admission would have seemed impossible only a short time ago.

Her conscience still speaks of duty, but her heart has begun to answer with equal strength.

Continue therefore to show the same respectful devotion that has guided your conduct until now. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more inevitable her defeat will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue approaches its decisive moment.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a tenderness that she once feared even to imagine. The poor girl believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, becomes more passionate each day. His devotion to her now governs every thought of his life.

Soon their affection will pass the point where prudence alone can restrain it.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the conclusion of your conquest with great impatience.

Letter 108

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, I cannot hide the emotion I felt when reading your last letter.

When you confess that silence between us would cause you loneliness, I feel a happiness that I had scarcely dared to hope for.

Yet the more our affection grows, the more clearly I see the obstacles that threaten our future.

I know that the authority of your family must be respected. Yet I cannot persuade my heart to accept calmly the idea of losing you.

If destiny truly separates us, I will obey that decision with resignation. But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Part 30

Letter 109

## Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has filled me with both happiness and fear.

Happiness, because I see how sincere your affection is. Fear, because I begin to understand how strong that affection has become for both of us.

When I imagine that our correspondence might end, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily describe. Yet at the same time I ask myself whether continuing to write to you may lead us into a situation that we cannot control.

The more I think about it, the more I realize how difficult our position has become.

My mother still speaks of the marriage she has arranged for me as if it were already decided. Each time I hear her mention it, I feel a sorrow that I try to hide.

I do not know whether it is right for me to continue writing these thoughts. Yet silence seems impossible when my heart is so troubled.

Forgive me if I have spoken too openly.

Cecilia Volanges

## Letter 110

### The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has moved me more deeply than any words I have ever received.

When you speak of the sorrow you feel at the thought of our separation, I cannot hide that I experience the same pain.

I know that the wishes of your family must be respected, and I would never dare to encourage you to oppose them. Yet the affection that has grown between us has become too strong for me to pretend that it does not exist.

If there were any honourable means by which we could hope for a different future, I would embrace it with all the courage I possess.

Until that moment arrives, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the most precious happiness of my life.

Believe that my devotion will remain faithful whatever destiny may decide.  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 111

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must write to you once more, although I fear that each letter only increases the agitation of my thoughts.

Since our last correspondence I have tried to restore the calm that once guided my life. I repeated to myself the principles that have always governed my conduct and reminded myself of the duties that my honour requires.

Yet despite these efforts I find that my thoughts return constantly to the conversations we have had.

Your sincerity and the respect you show have made it impossible for me to consider you with indifference.

This confession fills me with shame, yet I cannot hide the truth any longer.

I feel that my strength grows weaker each day.

I beg you therefore to show generosity toward the weakness that I struggle to overcome.

Help me preserve the peace that my conscience demands.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 112

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled my heart with emotion.

When you confess the struggle that now occupies your thoughts, you reveal a sincerity that inspires both admiration and tenderness.

Believe me when I say that nothing in the world would persuade me to abuse the confidence you have shown.

The sentiment that unites us is not a passing desire but a devotion born from

the admiration your virtue first inspired in me.

Your goodness and sincerity have awakened in me feelings that I once believed impossible.

If my affection causes you pain, I would rather suffer in silence than disturb the peace of your conscience.

Yet I cannot hide the happiness that your confession has given me.

Whatever decision you take, my respect and devotion will remain unchanged.

Valmont

## Part 31

### Letter 113

#### The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letters you describe reveal that the moment of surrender cannot be far away.

Madame de Tourvel now confesses openly that her strength weakens and that your presence occupies her thoughts constantly. Such an admission proves that the struggle she invokes grows more difficult each day.

Her conscience still speaks of duty, yet her heart has begun to answer with equal force. In such conflicts the heart rarely remains silent for long.

Continue therefore with the same patience that has guided your conduct until now. Do not hurry the conclusion of your enterprise. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more inevitable her defeat will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances toward a decisive moment.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a tenderness that she once feared even to imagine. The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, becomes more passionate each day. His devotion now governs every thought of his life.

Soon their affection will become too strong to remain hidden behind the modest

language they continue to use.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final triumph of your conquest with great impatience.

Letter 114

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has left me in a state of deep reflection.

When you speak of the sorrow that our separation might bring, I feel both gratitude and anxiety.

Gratitude, because your sincerity proves that my affection is not entirely unreturned. Anxiety, because the obstacles that stand between us appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your family, and I know that honour requires obedience to them. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought of losing you.

If there were any honourable means by which I could defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until such a moment arrives, I must be content with the happiness that your letters continue to bring me.

Believe that my devotion will remain faithful whatever destiny may decide.

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 115

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has moved me deeply.

Each time you speak of the devotion you feel, I realize more clearly how important our friendship has become to me.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more I understand the difficulty of the future

that awaits us. My mother still speaks of the marriage she has arranged for me as if it were already certain.

Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily hide.

I do not know whether destiny can change what has already been decided. Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change might be possible.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 116

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I write to you today with a sincerity that I no longer have the strength to conceal.

For a long time I believed that I could resist the sentiment that your presence awakened in my heart. I repeated to myself the duties that my honour requires and the principles that have always guided my life.

Yet despite all my efforts I feel that my resistance grows weaker each day.

Your sincerity, your respect, and the admiration you express have made it impossible for me to consider you with indifference.

This confession fills me with both shame and sorrow, yet I cannot deny the truth any longer.

I fear that the strength on which I once relied has begun to fail me.

I beg you therefore to show generosity toward the weakness that I struggle to overcome.

Madame de Tourvel

Part 32

Letter 117

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled me with an emotion that I cannot easily express.

When you confess the struggle that now occupies your heart, you reveal a sincerity that inspires both admiration and tenderness.

Believe me when I say that I would never wish to abuse the confidence you have shown. The respect I feel for your virtue remains greater than every other sentiment.

Yet I cannot hide the truth that your confession has awakened a happiness in my heart that I once believed impossible.

The admiration I first felt for your character has become a devotion that now governs every thought of my life.

If such a sentiment must remain without hope, I will accept that destiny. But I could not remain silent after the sincerity you have shown.

Whatever decision you make, my respect and admiration will remain unchanged.

Valmont

Letter 118

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has affected me deeply.

When you speak with such respect and devotion, I feel both gratitude and fear.

Gratitude, because the sincerity of your sentiments honours the confidence I have shown. Fear, because the emotion that unites us now appears stronger than the resistance I once believed unshakable.

For many days I have struggled to restore the calm that once guided my thoughts. I repeated to myself the duties that my conscience demands and the vows that my honour obliges me to respect.

Yet despite these efforts I feel that the strength of my resolution grows weaker.

I fear that the struggle between duty and affection may soon become too painful to endure.

Forgive me if my words appear confused. My heart is no longer capable of the calm certainty that once guided it.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 119

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the confession you have received from Madame de Tourvel leaves no doubt about the success of your enterprise.

She now admits openly that her strength fails and that the struggle she invokes has become almost unbearable.

When a woman reaches such a point, resistance rarely survives much longer.

Continue therefore with the same respectful patience that has guided you until now. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more complete her surrender will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue approaches the decisive moment that I have long anticipated.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a warmth that she can scarcely conceal. The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, becomes more passionate each day. His devotion to her now governs every thought of his life.

Soon the innocence that has protected them until now will no longer restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final moment of your conquest with great impatience.

Letter 120

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, I cannot hide the emotion I felt when reading your last letter.

When you confess that the future arranged by your family fills you with sadness, I feel both gratitude and sorrow.

Gratitude, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel is not entirely unreturned. Sorrow, because the obstacles that separate us appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought of losing you.

If there were any honourable means by which I could defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until such a moment arrives, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the most precious happiness of my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

## Part 33

### Letter 121

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have read your last letter with a feeling that I can scarcely describe.

When you speak of the devotion you feel for me, I realize more clearly than before how deeply our friendship has grown.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more I think of the future that my family has prepared for me, the more painful it becomes to imagine that our correspondence may one day end.

When my mother speaks of Count Gercourt and the marriage she has arranged, I feel a sadness that I struggle to conceal.

I do not know whether it is right for me to continue writing these thoughts. Yet silence would seem even more difficult.

Forgive me if my words appear imprudent.

## Cecilia Volanges

### Letter 122

#### The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has confirmed the sincerity of the affection that unites us.

When you confess that the future arranged for you causes sorrow, I feel both hope and anxiety.

Hope, because your words show that my devotion has not been entirely useless. Anxiety, because I know that the authority of your family may soon separate us.

I would never dare to oppose openly the wishes of your mother. Yet I cannot persuade my heart to accept calmly the idea of losing you.

If there were any honourable path that might allow us to defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until such a moment arrives, I must continue to cherish every letter you send me as the greatest consolation of my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

### Letter 123

#### The Marchioness de Merteuil to Cecilia Volanges

My dear child, the letters you have shown me reveal clearly that the affection between you and the Chevalier Danceny has become very strong.

Such feelings are natural, yet they must be guided with prudence if they are not to lead you into difficulty.

You must remember that the marriage your mother has arranged still exists. Until circumstances change, you must continue to behave with the greatest discretion.

Continue therefore to write to the Chevalier with the same modest tone that has

guided your correspondence until now.

Express esteem and friendship, but avoid words that might appear too passionate.

If the future should one day free you from the obligations that now bind you, then your sentiments may perhaps be expressed more openly.

Until that moment arrives, patience and prudence must guide your conduct.

Your affectionate friend,

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 124

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has remained constantly in my thoughts.

When you confess that the struggle between duty and affection becomes more painful each day, you reveal a sincerity that inspires both admiration and tenderness.

Believe me when I say that I would never wish to abuse the confidence you have shown.

The admiration I first felt for your virtue has become a devotion that now governs every moment of my life.

Your goodness and sincerity have awakened in me feelings that I once believed impossible.

If my affection causes you pain, I would rather withdraw in silence than disturb the peace of your conscience.

Yet I cannot hide the happiness that your confession has given me.

Whatever decision you take, my respect and devotion will remain unchanged.

Valmont

Part 34

Letter 125

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must answer your last letter with a sincerity that I can no longer resist.

For many days I have struggled to restore the calm that once governed my thoughts. I repeated to myself the duties that my conscience demands and the vows that my honour obliges me to respect.

Yet despite these efforts I feel that the resistance on which I relied grows weaker each day.

Your words remain constantly in my memory. When I try to forget them, they return with greater force.

I now understand that the struggle I experience is no longer only a question of prudence but a conflict that touches the deepest part of my heart.

This confession fills me with shame, yet I cannot deny the truth any longer.

I fear that the strength I once believed unshakable has begun to fail.

I beg you therefore to show generosity toward the weakness that I struggle to overcome.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 126

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled me with an emotion that I can scarcely express.

When you confess the weakness that troubles your heart, you reveal a sincerity that inspires both admiration and tenderness.

Believe me when I say that nothing in the world could persuade me to abuse the confidence you have shown.

The devotion I feel for you is not a passing sentiment but the most sincere affection I have ever known.

Your virtue first inspired my admiration. Your sincerity has now won my heart entirely.

If destiny refuses to grant me the happiness of your affection, I will still remain

faithful to the respect and devotion that your character has awakened in me.

Yet I cannot conceal the hope that your words have inspired.

Valmont

Letter 127

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letter you have received from Madame de Tourvel leaves little doubt about the success of your enterprise.

She now confesses openly that the strength of her resistance begins to fail. Such a declaration proves that the struggle she invokes has nearly reached its conclusion.

Continue therefore with the same respectful patience that has guided your conduct until now.

The more she believes in your sincerity, the more inevitable her surrender will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances toward the moment I have long anticipated.

Cecilia and Danceny now speak of each other with a tenderness that they can scarcely conceal.

The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, has become entirely devoted to her.

Soon the affection between them will grow too strong to remain hidden behind the modest language they still use.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final triumph of your conquest with great impatience.

Letter 128

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled me with both happiness and sorrow.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel is not entirely unreturned. Sorrow, because the obstacles that stand between us appear stronger each day.

When you speak of the sadness that the future arranged for you inspires, I feel a gratitude that I cannot easily describe.

Yet I know that the authority of your family must be respected, and I would never wish to encourage you to oppose it.

If destiny truly separates us, I will accept that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

## Part 35

### Letter 129

#### Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has touched me more deeply than I can express.

Each time you speak of the affection that unites us, I feel both happiness and anxiety. Happiness, because I know that my friendship is dear to you. Anxiety, because the future that awaits us appears more uncertain each day.

When my mother speaks of the marriage she has arranged, I feel a sadness that I struggle to hide. I try to persuade myself that obedience to her wishes must guide my conduct.

Yet when I think of losing the correspondence that has become the most agreeable part of my life, my heart becomes heavy with sorrow.

I do not know whether these reflections are wise, but I felt that silence would

be impossible.

Forgive me if I have spoken too openly.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 130

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has confirmed the sincerity of the sentiments that unite us.

When you confess that the thought of our separation fills you with sorrow, I feel both gratitude and pain.

Gratitude, because I now know that my devotion has not been entirely useless. Pain, because the obstacles that threaten our future appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the idea of losing you.

If there were any honourable means by which I could defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it with all my strength.

Until such a moment arrives, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the most precious consolation of my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 131

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must answer your last letter with the same sincerity that has guided our recent correspondence.

The struggle I described to you has become more painful than I imagined possible.

I repeat constantly to myself the duties that my honour demands and the vows that bind my life. Yet despite these efforts I feel that the resistance on which I once

relied grows weaker each day.

Your words remain constantly in my thoughts. When I try to forget them, they return with greater force.

This confession fills me with shame, yet I cannot hide the truth any longer.

I fear that the strength I once believed unshakable has begun to fail.

I beg you therefore to show generosity toward the weakness that I struggle to overcome.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 132

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the letters I continue to receive from Madame de Tourvel confirm what I have long predicted.

She now confesses openly that the resistance on which she relied begins to fail.

Such a declaration would have seemed impossible only a short time ago.

The struggle between duty and affection now occupies every thought of her life.

I continue to behave with the same respectful devotion that has guided my conduct from the beginning. Each effort she makes to resist only increases the strength of the sentiment she fears.

Believe me, my dear friend, the moment of surrender approaches.

Continue to watch the progress of your young lovers. Their innocence must still provide you with much amusement.

Farewell.

Part 36

Letter 133

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, your last letter confirms once again the progress of your

enterprise.

Madame de Tourvel now confesses openly that her resistance weakens and that your words remain constantly in her thoughts. Such a declaration proves that the struggle she invokes cannot continue much longer.

Continue therefore with the same patience and moderation that have guided you until now. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more complete her surrender will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue reaches a moment that promises great amusement.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a tenderness that she no longer tries to hide. The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, grows more passionate each day. His devotion now governs every thought of his life.

Soon their affection will become too strong to remain hidden behind the modest language they still use.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final success of your conquest with great curiosity.

Letter 134

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled me with a mixture of happiness and sorrow.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel for you is not entirely unreturned. Sorrow, because the obstacles that stand between us appear stronger each day.

When you speak of the sadness that the future arranged by your family inspires, I feel both gratitude and anxiety.

Gratitude, because your words show that our friendship has become dear to you. Anxiety, because I know that circumstances may soon separate us forever.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet

my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought of losing you.

Until destiny reveals what the future will bring, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the greatest happiness of my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 135

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has touched me deeply.

Each time you speak of the devotion you feel, I realize more clearly how important our correspondence has become to my happiness.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more I understand how difficult the future may become. My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already certain.

Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily conceal.

I do not know whether destiny might change the plans that others have prepared for us.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change might be possible.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 136

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must write to you once again with the same sincerity that has guided my recent letters.

The struggle I described to you has now reached a point where silence would be impossible.

I have tried repeatedly to restore the calm that once governed my thoughts. I

reminded myself of the duties that my honour demands and of the vows that bind my life.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that the resistance on which I once relied has nearly disappeared.

Your sincerity and devotion have awakened in my heart emotions that I can no longer deny.

This confession fills me with both shame and sorrow, yet I cannot conceal the truth any longer.

I fear that the strength I once believed unshakable has finally abandoned me.

Madame de Tourvel

Part 37

Letter 137

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled me with a happiness that I scarcely dare to express.

When you confess that the resistance you once trusted has disappeared, you reveal a sincerity that touches my heart deeply.

Believe me when I say that nothing could inspire in me greater respect than the struggle you have described. Your virtue and your honesty have commanded my admiration from the first moment I knew you.

Yet I cannot deny that your confession has also awakened a hope that I had long believed impossible.

The devotion I feel for you has become the guiding passion of my life. Your goodness and dignity have awakened emotions that I once believed my heart incapable of experiencing.

If such a sentiment must remain without fulfilment, I will accept that destiny with resignation.

Yet if your heart now speaks with the same sincerity that your letter reveals, I

can only thank heaven for a happiness that I once believed forever beyond my reach.

Valmont

Letter 138

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has increased the agitation of my thoughts.

When you speak of hope and happiness, I feel both gratitude and fear.

Gratitude, because the sincerity of your devotion honours the confidence I have shown. Fear, because the sentiment that now unites us appears stronger than the resistance I once believed unshakable.

I no longer know how to restore the calm that once guided my life.

Each time I attempt to repeat the principles that have always governed my conduct, my thoughts return to you with a force that I cannot resist.

This struggle has become so painful that I sometimes wish I had never known the sincerity of your affection.

Yet even as I write these words, I feel that my heart refuses to return to the indifference I once possessed.

Forgive the confusion of my thoughts. My heart no longer knows how to guide itself.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 139

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the latest letters you describe show that your conquest now stands at the edge of its final success.

Madame de Tourvel confesses openly that her resistance has nearly disappeared and that the thought of you occupies her mind constantly.

When a woman reaches such a point, the conclusion rarely remains uncertain

for long.

Continue therefore with the same respectful patience that has guided you until now.

The more she believes in your sincerity, the more complete her surrender will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue moves toward a moment that promises equal amusement.

Cecilia and Danceny now write to each other with a tenderness that they can scarcely conceal.

The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, now thinks of nothing except his devotion to her.

Soon the innocence that has protected them until now will no longer restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final result of your enterprise with great impatience.

Letter 140

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled me with a happiness that I scarcely dared to hope for.

When you confess that your heart cannot return to indifference, I feel that the affection I have long cherished has not been entirely useless.

Yet this happiness is accompanied by a deep anxiety.

The more clearly we understand the sincerity of our feelings, the more difficult it becomes to accept the future that threatens to separate us.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought of losing you.

If destiny truly decides against us, I will obey that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

With devotion and respect,  
Chevalier Danceny

Part 38

Letter 141

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has touched me deeply.

When you say that my words have given you happiness, I feel both joy and fear. Joy, because I know that the friendship between us has become dear to you. Fear, because the more openly we speak of our feelings, the more uncertain our situation appears.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already certain. Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily hide.

Yet when I imagine that our correspondence might end, I feel an even greater sorrow.

I do not know whether destiny can change what has already been decided. But I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change may still be possible.

Forgive me if these reflections appear imprudent.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 142

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled my heart with both happiness and anxiety.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel for you is not entirely unreturned. Anxiety, because I see more clearly each day the obstacles

that stand between us.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate us forever.

If there were any honourable means by which we could defend the happiness we have discovered, I would embrace it without hesitation.

Until that moment arrives, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the greatest consolation of my life.

With devotion and respect,  
Chevalier Danceny

Letter 143

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I write to you today with a sincerity that I can no longer resist.

The struggle that I described in my last letters has now reached a point where silence has become impossible.

I tried many times to restore the calm that once governed my thoughts. I reminded myself of the duties that my honour demands and the vows that guide my life.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that the resistance on which I once relied has finally disappeared.

Your sincerity and devotion have awakened in my heart emotions that I can no longer deny.

This confession fills me with both shame and sorrow, yet I cannot conceal the truth any longer.

I fear that the strength I once believed unshakable has abandoned me completely.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 144

## The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the letter I have just received from Madame de Tourvel confirms the success of my enterprise.

She now confesses openly that the resistance on which she once relied has entirely disappeared.

Such a declaration leaves little doubt about the final result.

The struggle between duty and affection has now reached the point where her heart can no longer defend itself.

I continue to behave with the same respectful devotion that has guided my conduct from the beginning.

Soon the conclusion that we have long expected will become inevitable.

Continue to observe the progress of your young lovers. Their innocence must still provide you with much amusement.

Farewell.

## Part 39

### Letter 145

## The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letter you have received from Madame de Tourvel proves that your enterprise has reached its decisive moment.

When a woman confesses openly that her resistance has entirely disappeared, she has already surrendered more than she imagines.

Continue therefore with the same respectful patience that has guided your conduct until now. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more complete her submission will become.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances toward the moment that I have long anticipated.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a warmth that she no longer attempts to

conceal. The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceney, for his part, thinks of nothing except the devotion he feels for her.

Soon their affection will become too strong to remain hidden behind the modest language they still use.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final triumph of your conquest with great curiosity.

Letter 146

The Chevalier Danceney to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has brought me both happiness and sorrow.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel for you is not entirely unreturned. Sorrow, because the obstacles that separate us appear stronger each day.

When you speak of the sadness that the future arranged by your family inspires, I feel a gratitude that I cannot easily describe.

Yet I know that the authority of your mother must be respected, and I would never wish to encourage you to oppose it.

If destiny decides that we must be separated, I will accept that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceney

Letter 147

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceney

Sir, your last letter has touched me deeply.

Each time you speak of the devotion you feel, I realize more clearly how dear our correspondence has become to me.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more I understand the difficulty of the future that awaits us.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already certain.

Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily hide.

I do not know whether destiny might change the plans that others have prepared for us.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change might still be possible.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 148

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must speak to you with the sincerity that has guided my recent letters.

The struggle that I described to you has now reached its conclusion.

I have tried many times to restore the calm that once governed my life. I repeated to myself the duties that my honour demands and the vows that bind my conscience.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that the resistance on which I relied has entirely disappeared.

Your sincerity and devotion have awakened in my heart a sentiment that I can no longer deny.

This confession fills me with both shame and sorrow, yet I cannot conceal the truth any longer.

I fear that the weakness I once struggled to overcome has now completely conquered my heart.

Madame de Tourvel

## Part 40

### Letter 149

#### The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has filled me with an emotion that I cannot describe without trembling.

When you confess that the struggle which long defended your heart has finally ended, you reveal a sincerity that touches me more deeply than any words I have ever received.

Believe me when I say that your virtue has always commanded my admiration. Even now, when you speak of weakness, I see only the noble honesty of a heart that refuses deception.

The devotion I feel for you has become the most powerful sentiment of my life. Your goodness and dignity have awakened feelings that I once believed my heart incapable of experiencing.

If your affection now answers the devotion I have long confessed, I can only consider myself the most fortunate of men.

Yet I beg you not to regret the sincerity you have shown.

The sentiment that unites us is born not from weakness but from admiration and respect.

Valmont

### Letter 150

#### Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has increased the agitation that already troubles my heart.

When you speak of happiness and hope, I feel both tenderness and fear.

Tenderness, because the sincerity of your devotion has touched me deeply. Fear, because the sentiment that now unites us places me in a situation that my

conscience cannot easily accept.

I know that the confession I made in my last letter has already carried me further than prudence should permit.

Yet I could not continue to hide the truth.

The affection that I feel for you now appears stronger than the resistance I once believed unshakable.

Even as I write these words, I feel both joy and sorrow.

Joy, because your sincerity has awakened a tenderness that I cannot deny.

Sorrow, because I know that this happiness may lead us toward regret.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 151

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the confession you have received from Madame de Tourvel leaves little doubt about the result of your enterprise.

When a woman admits openly that she loves, even while fearing the consequences, the victory is already complete.

Continue therefore to behave with the same respectful devotion that has guided you until now.

The more she believes in your sincerity, the more deeply she will justify the step she has taken.

Meanwhile my own intrigue advances toward the moment I have long prepared.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with an affection that she scarcely attempts to hide. The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, now thinks of nothing except the devotion he feels for her.

Soon their innocence will no longer restrain the emotions that grow stronger each day.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final chapter of your conquest with great curiosity.

Letter 152

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has given me a happiness that I scarcely dared to hope for.

When you confess that the future arranged for you fills you with sadness, I feel both gratitude and sorrow.

Gratitude, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel is not entirely unreturned.

Sorrow, because the obstacles that stand between us appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society.

Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate us forever.

Until destiny reveals what the future will bring, I will continue to cherish every letter you send me as the greatest happiness of my life.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Part 41

Letter 153

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have received your last letter, and I cannot hide the emotion it has caused me.

Each time you speak of the devotion you feel, I realize more clearly how dear our correspondence has become to me.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more uncertain our future appears.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already decided. Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily conceal.

I do not know whether destiny may one day change the plans that others have prepared for us.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change may still be possible.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 154

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has brought me both happiness and anxiety.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel is not entirely unreturned.

Anxiety, because I see more clearly each day the obstacles that stand between us.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate us forever.

If destiny truly decides against us, I will obey that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 155

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I write to you today with a sincerity that I can no longer hide.

The struggle that I described in my previous letters has now reached a point where my heart refuses to obey the commands of my reason.

I tried many times to restore the calm that once governed my thoughts. I repeated to myself the duties that my honour demands and the vows that guide my life.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that the affection you have awakened in my heart has become stronger than my resistance.

This confession fills me with both shame and tenderness.

Shame, because I know how dangerous such a sentiment may become.

Tenderness, because I cannot deny the happiness that your devotion inspires.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 156

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the letter I have just received from Madame de Tourvel confirms the success of my enterprise beyond all doubt.

She now confesses openly that the affection she once resisted has become stronger than her sense of duty.

Such a declaration would have seemed impossible only a short time ago.

The struggle between reason and passion has now ended in favour of the sentiment that she once feared.

I continue to behave with the same respectful devotion that has guided my conduct from the beginning.

Soon the conclusion of this adventure will become inevitable.

Continue to observe the progress of your young lovers. Their innocence must still provide you with much amusement.

Farewell.

Part 42

Letter 157

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the news you give me about Madame de Tourvel confirms what I expected long ago.

When a woman admits that affection has become stronger than duty, the conquest is already complete.

Continue therefore to behave with the same calm respect that has guided you until now. The more she believes in your sincerity, the more firmly she will justify the step she has taken.

Meanwhile my own intrigue approaches a moment that promises equal amusement.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with an affection that she scarcely attempts to conceal. The poor girl continues to believe that I guide her only for her happiness, and she shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, thinks of nothing except the devotion he feels for her.

Soon the innocence that still protects them will no longer restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final success of your enterprise with great curiosity.

Letter 158

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled me with both joy and sorrow.

Joy, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel for you is not entirely unreturned.

Sorrow, because the obstacles that separate us appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society. Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate

us forever.

If destiny truly decides against us, I will obey that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 159

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, your last letter has touched me deeply.

Each time you speak of the devotion you feel, I realize more clearly how dear our correspondence has become to me.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more uncertain our future appears.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already decided.

Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily hide.

I do not know whether destiny may one day change the plans that others have prepared for us.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change may still be possible.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 160

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must write to you once again with the sincerity that has guided my recent letters.

The affection that I once feared now occupies every thought of my heart.

I tried many times to resist the sentiment that your devotion awakened in me. I reminded myself of the duties that my honour demands and the vows that guide my life.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that my resistance has finally disappeared.

I cannot deny the tenderness that your sincerity inspires in my heart.

This confession fills me with both happiness and sorrow.

Happiness, because your devotion has awakened an affection that I can no longer conceal.

Sorrow, because I know how dangerous such a sentiment may become.

Madame de Tourvel

Part 43

Letter 161

The Viscount Valmont to Madame de Tourvel

Madam, your last letter has brought me a happiness that I once believed impossible.

When you confess that your resistance has disappeared and that my devotion now occupies your thoughts, you give me a joy that I can scarcely express.

Believe me when I say that I will never forget the sincerity that has guided your words.

Your virtue first inspired my admiration. Your honesty has now awakened a devotion that governs every moment of my life.

If the affection that unites us has caused you sorrow, I beg you to remember that it was born from respect and admiration.

I will never ask anything from you that might disturb the peace of your conscience.

Your happiness will always remain dearer to me than my own.

Valmont

Letter 162

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, your last letter has touched me deeply.

When you speak with such respect and tenderness, I feel both gratitude and fear.

Gratitude, because your devotion honours the confidence that I have shown.

Fear, because the affection that now unites us appears stronger than the resistance I once believed unshakable.

I no longer know how to restore the calm that once governed my life.

Each time I repeat to myself the principles that have always guided my conduct, my thoughts return to you with a force that I cannot resist.

This confession fills me with both happiness and regret.

Happiness, because your sincerity has awakened an affection that I cannot deny.

Regret, because I know that such happiness may lead us toward sorrow.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 163

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the progress you describe leaves little doubt about the success of your enterprise.

Madame de Tourvel now admits openly that her thoughts constantly return to you and that her resistance has vanished.

Such a confession proves that the victory you sought has already been achieved.

Continue therefore with the same respectful devotion that has guided your conduct until now.

The more she believes in your sincerity, the more firmly she will justify the step she has taken.

Meanwhile my own intrigue approaches a moment that promises equal amusement.

Cecilia and Danceny now write to each other with a tenderness that they no

longer attempt to conceal.

The poor girl still believes that I guide her only for her happiness, and she continues to show me every letter she receives.

Danceney now thinks of nothing except the devotion he feels for her.

Soon the innocence that still protects them will no longer restrain their emotions.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final result of your conquest with great curiosity.

Letter 164

The Chevalier Danceney to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has given me both happiness and anxiety.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel for you is not entirely unreturned.

Anxiety, because I see more clearly each day the obstacles that stand between us.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society.

Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate us forever.

If destiny truly decides against us, I will obey that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceney

Part 44

Letter 165

Cecilia Volanges to the Chevalier Danceney

Sir, your last letter has moved me deeply.

Each time you speak of the affection you feel for me, I realize more clearly how dear our correspondence has become.

Yet this realization also fills me with fear.

The more our affection grows, the more uncertain our future appears.

My mother continues to speak of the marriage she has arranged as if it were already certain.

Each time she mentions it, I feel a sadness that I cannot easily conceal.

I do not know whether destiny might one day change the plans that others have prepared for us.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from hoping that such a change may still be possible.

Cecilia Volanges

Letter 166

The Chevalier Danceny to Cecilia Volanges

Madam, your last letter has filled me with both happiness and sorrow.

Happiness, because your sincerity proves that the affection I feel is not entirely unreturned.

Sorrow, because the obstacles that stand between us appear stronger each day.

I respect the wishes of your mother and the customs that govern society.

Yet my heart refuses to accept calmly the thought that such obstacles must separate us forever.

If destiny truly decides against us, I will obey that decision with resignation.

But until that moment arrives, allow me to continue cherishing the friendship that has brought so much happiness into my life.

Your letters remain the greatest consolation I possess.

With devotion and respect,

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 167

Madame de Tourvel to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I must once again write to you with the sincerity that has guided my recent letters.

The affection that I once feared has now become the strongest sentiment of my heart.

I tried many times to resist the emotion that your devotion awakened in me. I reminded myself of the duties that my honour demands and the vows that guide my life.

Yet despite all these efforts I feel that my resistance has completely disappeared.

I can no longer deny the tenderness that your sincerity inspires in my heart.

This confession fills me with both happiness and regret.

Happiness, because your devotion has awakened a feeling that I cannot conceal.

Regret, because I know that such happiness may lead us toward sorrow.

Madame de Tourvel

Letter 168

The Viscount Valmont to the Marchioness de Merteuil

My dear friend, the latest letter I have received from Madame de Tourvel confirms once again the success of my enterprise.

She now confesses openly that the affection she once feared has become the strongest sentiment of her heart.

Such a declaration proves that the struggle between duty and passion has now completely ended.

I continue to behave with the same respectful devotion that has guided my conduct from the beginning.

Soon the conclusion of this adventure will become inevitable.

Continue to observe the progress of your young lovers. Their innocence must

still provide you with much amusement.

Farewell.

Part 45

Letter 169

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Viscount Valmont

My dear Viscount, the letter you describe leaves no doubt about the result of your enterprise.

Madame de Tourvel now admits openly that the affection she once resisted has become the strongest sentiment of her heart.

When a woman speaks in such a manner, the conquest is already complete.

Continue therefore with the same respectful devotion that has guided you until now.

The more she believes in your sincerity, the more firmly she will justify the step she has taken.

Meanwhile my own intrigue approaches a moment that promises equal amusement.

Cecilia now writes to Danceny with a tenderness that she no longer attempts to hide.

The poor girl continues to believe that I guide her only for her happiness, and she still shows me every letter she receives.

Danceny, for his part, now thinks of nothing except the devotion he feels for her.

Soon their innocence will no longer restrain the emotions that grow stronger each day.

When that moment arrives, the lesson I intend to give them will finally begin.

Farewell, my dear friend. I await the final success of your conquest with great curiosity.

Part 46

Letter 170

The Chevalier Danceny to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I write to you today in a state of deep emotion. The news I have received has shaken me so strongly that I do not know how to calm my thoughts.

You know how sincerely I have admired Madame de Tourvel. Her virtue, her kindness, and her calm dignity inspired respect in everyone who knew her. For me, she was not only admirable but almost sacred.

Yesterday I learned that she is no longer alive.

When I first heard these words, I refused to believe them. I hoped that the report might be false or exaggerated. But the truth soon became clear. Madame de Tourvel died after a long illness that followed the terrible troubles she had recently suffered.

This news has filled me with grief.

Everyone who knew her speaks of the gentleness she showed even during her final days. They say that she thought often of the events that had disturbed her life and that she prayed for peace and forgiveness.

Such a death deserves respect and compassion from all who hear of it.

Yet I cannot prevent myself from thinking about the cause of her suffering.

The story of her misfortune is now known to many people. They speak openly about the passion that once united her with the Viscount Valmont and about the sorrow that followed when she learned the truth about his conduct.

When I think of these events, my heart fills with anger.

I know that the Viscount once called me his friend. But after learning what has happened, I can no longer regard him with the same feelings.

If the reports I have heard are true, Madame de Tourvel died with a broken heart.

Such a fate cannot leave any honourable man indifferent.

I feel that justice demands a response.

I therefore inform you, Madam, that I have decided to challenge the Viscount

Valmont. I intend to demand satisfaction for the wrongs that have brought such sorrow into the life of a woman whose virtue deserved only admiration.

I know that such a decision may appear severe.

Yet my conscience tells me that silence would be even more dishonourable.

I do not pretend that this action will repair the injustice that has been done. Nothing can restore the life that has been lost.

But at least it may prove that the memory of Madame de Tourvel is not abandoned by those who respect virtue and honour.

I write to you because you once knew the Viscount well and because I believe that you will understand the motives that guide my decision.

Tomorrow I will send him the message that honour requires.

Whatever the result may be, I will accept it with calm resolution.

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 171

The Marchioness de Merteuil to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have received the letter in which you inform me of your decision to challenge the Viscount Valmont.

The news you bring concerning Madame de Tourvel has affected me deeply. Her virtue and her gentleness deserved a happier destiny.

Everyone who knew her must feel sorrow when thinking of the troubles that darkened the final period of her life.

Yet I cannot entirely approve the resolution you describe.

The death of Madame de Tourvel is certainly a misfortune. But I doubt whether the action you propose will repair the sorrow that has already occurred.

A duel may satisfy the pride of those who demand vengeance, yet it rarely restores justice.

I fear that such an encounter may only add a new tragedy to a story that has already caused too much suffering.

The Viscount Valmont possesses courage as well as experience. If you provoke

him, the result may place your own life in danger.

You are still young, and your future may contain many years of happiness and honour.

I would regret seeing such a future destroyed by an act that cannot change what has already happened.

Nevertheless, I understand the emotion that inspires your decision.

The memory of Madame de Tourvel deserves respect from all who knew her virtue. If you believe that your honour requires this action, I cannot pretend that my advice will change your mind.

I therefore ask only that you consider the danger carefully before proceeding.

Whatever your decision may be, I wish that prudence and calm judgment will guide you.

The Marchioness de Merteuil

Letter 172

The Chevalier Danceny to the Viscount Valmont

Sir, I write to you today in order to demand an explanation.

You know the sorrowful news that has recently spread through society. Madame de Tourvel is dead.

The circumstances that preceded her death are now known to many people. They speak openly of the passion that once united you with her and of the cruel disappointment that followed.

I do not wish to judge the entire story from rumours alone. But enough has been revealed to convince me that the misfortunes she suffered cannot be separated from your conduct.

Madame de Tourvel was a woman whose virtue inspired admiration everywhere.

To see such a person reduced to despair is an event that no honourable man can consider with indifference.

I therefore demand satisfaction for the injury that has been done to the memory

of a woman whose goodness deserved only respect.

If you believe that my accusation is unjust, you have the opportunity to defend your honour.

If, on the contrary, you recognize the justice of my indignation, then you must accept the consequence that honour requires.

I expect your reply.

Chevalier Danceny

Letter 173

The Viscount Valmont to the Chevalier Danceny

Sir, I have received the letter in which you accuse me of responsibility for the death of Madame de Tourvel.

I will not attempt to justify myself by long explanations.

The sorrowful event you mention has affected me more deeply than you imagine. Madame de Tourvel possessed virtues that commanded the admiration of everyone who knew her.

If the circumstances of our acquaintance contributed to her suffering, I cannot deny that this thought has caused me great regret.

Nevertheless, the tone of your letter leaves me no choice.

You accuse me publicly of conduct that dishonours my name. Such accusations cannot remain unanswered.

I therefore accept the challenge you propose.

Tomorrow morning I will meet you at the place and hour that our seconds will arrange.

Whatever the result may be, I hope that the encounter will restore the honour that you believe injured.

Valmont

Letter 174

Madame de Volanges to the Marchioness de Merteuil

Madam, I must inform you of a tragic event that has recently occurred.

The duel between the Chevalier Danceny and the Viscount Valmont has taken place.

The encounter ended with the death of the Viscount.

During the duel, the Chevalier's sword struck his opponent with a wound that soon proved fatal. Before dying, the Viscount spoke calmly with those who were present and appeared to accept his fate without complaint.

This event has caused great agitation among all who hear the news.

Many people now speak openly about the events that preceded this tragedy.

The letters written by the Viscount have been discovered and have revealed many secrets that had long remained hidden.

These revelations have destroyed the reputation of several persons who once appeared respectable.

Among those most affected by these discoveries is the Marchioness de Merteuil, whose name has been connected with many intrigues that society had never suspected.

Thus the chain of events that began with private passions has now ended in public scandal and sorrow.

Letter 175

Madame de Volanges to Madame de Rosemonde

Madam, the tragic events that I described in my previous letter have now produced their final consequences.

The death of the Viscount Valmont has revealed many secrets that had long remained hidden. The letters that he wrote during his life have fallen into different hands, and their contents have spread rapidly through society.

These revelations have destroyed the reputation of the Marchioness de Merteuil.

Once admired for her intelligence and elegance, she is now avoided by many who once called themselves her friends. People speak openly about the intrigues

in which she was involved and about the cruel pleasure she appeared to take in the misfortunes of others.

The consequences have been severe.

She has been forced to leave society, and many believe that her fortune has also suffered great losses.

Thus the events that began with deception and pride have ended in ruin and disgrace.

As for the other persons involved in this unhappy story, they now attempt to rebuild their lives in silence and reflection.

The memory of Madame de Tourvel remains respected by all who knew her virtue.

Her death has reminded everyone how dangerous it can be to play with the hearts and reputations of others.

I hope that the lessons drawn from these events will prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Madame de Volanges