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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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The principal eunuch to Usbek in Paris

Many yellow women from the kingdom of Visapour [1] have arrived here ; I have bought one for your brother the governor of Mazendaran, [2] who a month ago sent me his sublime command and a hundred tomans. [3]

I am all the better judge of women that they do not take me aback, and that my eyes are not troubled by the movements of the heart.

I have never seen a beauty so classic and so perfect ; her sparkling eyes bring her countenance alive and heighten a bloom that could eclipse all the charms of Circassia. [4]

The principal eunuch of an Isfahan merchant was negotiating her price with me ; but she disdainfully avoided his eyes and seemed to seek mine, as if she wanted to tell me that an abject merchant was not worthy of her, and that she was fated for a more illustrious spouse.

I confess that I experience a inner joy when I think of the charms of this lovely person ; I can picture her entering your brother's seraglio ; I like to anticipate the surprise of all those women, the imperious pain of some, the silent but more painful affliction of others, the malevolent consolation of those who have no hope remaining, and the thwarted ambition of those who do.

I go from one end of the realm to the other to change the complection of an entire seraglio. What passions am I going to stir ! What fears and pains do I prepare !

Nevertheless in the midst of inner turmoil, the exterior will not be less tranquil. Great revolutions will be buried in the heart ; worries will be stifled, and joys contained ; obedience will be no less exact, and the rules no less inflexible. Sweetness, always forced to appear, will emerge from the very depths of despair.

We observe that the more women we have under our watch, the fewer problems they cause us. A greater necessity to please, less facility of getting together, more examples of submission : all these create chains for them. Some are constantly attentive to what the others are about ; it seems as if, in concert with us, they strive to make themselves more dependent ; they do practically half of our function, and open our eyes when we close them. Nay, they constantly incite the master against their rivals, and do not see how like they are to the ones who are punished.

But all this, magnificent lord, all this is nothing without the master's presence. What can we do with this vain phantom of an authority which is never entirely transferred ? We represent but weakly the half of yourself ; we can show them only a hateful rigor. But you, you temper fear with expectations, more absolute when you caress than you are when you threaten.

Return therefore, magnificent lord, return to these halls to fill them with the signs of your domination. Come assuage desperate passions ; come and suppress every pretext for failure ; come appease love, which is grumbling, and make even duty pleasant ; finally, come relieve your loyal eunuchs from a burden that becomes heavier by the day.

Letter 93

The Isfahan seraglio this 8th day of the moon of Zilhagé 1716

[1] "VISAPOR, or VISAPOUR, a kingdom in Decan toward the western coasts of the peninsula of the Indus, on this side of the Gulf of Bengala" (Collier 1701), today's Bijapur.

[2] "Province of Persia, near the Caspian Sea, with a city of the same name" (Moreri 1707).

[3] Gold coin of Persia : see letter 65.

[4] See letter 77. According to Tavernier, the women of Visapour were swarthy.