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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Roxane to Usbek [1] *in Paris*

Indeed I have deceived you : I have seduced your eunuchs, I have mocked your jealousy ; and I have managed to make of your horrible seraglio a place of delights and pleasures.

I am about to die ; the poison will flow into my veins : for what would I do here, since the only man who kept me alive is no more ? I die ; but my shade takes flight in good company : I have just sent on ahead those sacrilegious guards who have spilled the finest blood on earth.

How could you have thought me credulous enough to imagine that I was on earth only to worship your whims ? That while you allow yourself anything, you had the right to frustrate all my desires ? No, I may have been able to live in servitude, but I have always been free ; I have reformed your laws on those of nature, and my spirit has always maintained its independence. [2]

You ought still to thank me for the sacrifice I have made to you ; for having stooped to feigning fidelity to you ; for hiding in my heart like a coward what I ought to have shown openly to the whole world ; finally for having profaned virtue, but allowing my submission to your fantasies to be called by that name.

You were surprised not to find transports of love in me : if you had really known me, you would have found all the violence of loathing.

But you have long had the advantage of believing that a heart like mine was submissive to you ; we were both content : you thought I was deceived, and I was deceiving you.

This language no doubt seems new to you ; could it be possible that after overwhelming you with grief, I should further force you to admire my courage ? But it is finished : the poison is consuming me, my strength is failing ; the pen is falling from my hands ; I feel weakness overcoming even my hatred ; I die.

The Isfahan seraglio this 8th day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1720

[1] While awaiting the answer to his letter 147 of 4 October 1719, Usbek has written not a single letter, and his last one in terms of the novel's chronology, letter 138, is dated 11 November 1720 : by then he has surely received letter 148, sent on 2 March 1720 (S. L. 9 and 10 bear the same date), and plausibly even this one, the interval between being six months and three days.

[2] Six years earlier Zelis had written to him : "Even in the prison where you keep me, I am freer than you" (letter 60).