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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Letter 146	Letter 148
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Usbek to Nessir in Isfahan

Happy the man who, knowing all the value of an easy, tranquil life, rests his heart in the midst of his family, and knows no other land than the one where he was born ! [1]

I live in a barbaric clime, present to all who annoy me, absent from all who interest me ; an ominous sorrow seizes me ; I am falling into terrible dejection. I feel as if I am becoming nothing, and become myself again only when an ominous jealousy flares up and foments fear, suspicion, loathing, and regret in my soul.

You know me, Nessir, you have always seen into my heart as into your own : you would pity me if you knew my deplorable state. I sometimes wait six full months for news of the seraglio [2] ; I count the minute that go by ; my impatience always lengthens them for me ; and when the moment so awaited is about to arrive, a sudden reversal occurs in my heart ; my hand trembles to open a fateful letter ; that anxiety which was torturing me I now find the happiest state I can be in ; and I fear to lose it by a blow more cruel for me than a thousand deaths. [3]

But whatever reason I had for leaving my country, although I owe my life to my departure, I can no longer, Nessir, remain in this awful exile. Would I not die all the same a prey to my troubles ? I have urged Rica a thousand times to leave this foreign land, but he objects to all my resolutions : he attaches me here with a thousand pretexts ; he seems to have forgotten his homeland, or rather he seems to have forgotten me, so insensitive is he to my displeasures.

Wretched man that I am ! I wish to see my fatherland again, perhaps to be even more wretched ! And what shall I do there ? I am going to return my head to my enemies. [4] That is not all ; I shall enter the seraglio : there I must ask for an account of the fatal time of my absence. And if I find some guilty, what shall become of me ? And if the thought alone overwhelms me from so far, what will it be like when my presence makes it more vivid ? What will it be like if I must see, if I must hear what I dare not imagine without shuddering ? What will it be like, in short, if the punishments I shall myself pronounce are everlasting signs of my disarray and my despair ?

I shall go lock myself within walls more awful for me than for the women who are kept there ; I shall take with me all my suspicions. Their blandishments will conceal none of them from me : in my bed, in their arms, I will enjoy nothing but my apprehensions ; in a time so ill-suited to reflections, my jealousy will manage to make some. Scum unworthy of the human race, abject slaves whose heart has been closed forever to all sentiments of love, you would no longer bemoan your condition if you knew the unhappiness of mine.

Paris this 4th day of the moon of Chahban 1719 [5]

[1] It was seen at the outset that Usbek had not freely chosen to travel abroad (letter 8), but until now he has seemed satisfied with his decision.

[2] See letter 141, note 3. The dates of certain letters that answer each other (for example letters 40 and 41 : six months and eight days) confirm this remark.

Letter 147

[3] A melancholic, even tragic note in opposition to the refusal of violence manifested by Usbek in letter 6. The most urgent letters (140 and 142), have received no reply.

[4] The inverse complement of the phrase in letter 8 : "I departed, thus depriving my enemies of a victim." Although Usbek here seems resigned to returning to Persia, nothing ever confirms that he does so : see the following note, letter 138, note 5, and letter 150, note 1.

[5] This is Usbek's last letter in the novel's sequential (but not chronological) order, letter 138 and Supplementary Letter 8 being well posterior to it.