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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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Letter 142	Letter 144
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Solim to Usbek in Paris

If I remained silent any longer, I would be as blameworthy as all these criminals you have in your seraglio.

I was the confidant of the great eunuch, the most loyal of your slaves. When he saw he was near his end, he sent for me, and spoke these words to me : I die, but my only regret in departing life is that my failing eyes have found the wives of my master reprehensible. May heaven be able to protect him from all the misfortunes I foresee ; may my threatening shade come when I am gone to warn these traitors of their duty, and again intimidate them ! Here are the keys to these fearsome halls : take them to the oldest of the blacks ; but if after my death he wants vigilance, think to alert your master. As he ended these words, he expired in my arms.

I do not know what he wrote to you some time before his death about the conduct of your wives [1] ; there is a letter in the seraglio that would have borne terror with it had it been opened. [2] The one you have written since was intercepted three leagues from here ; I do not know what it is, that everything is turning badly.

Meanwhile your wives no longer recognize any restraint ; since the great eunuch's death, it seems they can be allowed to do anything. Roxane alone has remained dutiful [3] and preserves some modesty. We see morality corrupting by the day. We no longer find on your wives' faces that proud, austere virtue that once prevailed there. A new joy abroad in these halls is an infallible sign, according to me, of some new satisfaction. In the smallest things I notice liberties previously unknown. There even reigns among your slaves a certain indolence for their duty and the observance of rules that surprises me ; they no longer have that ardent zeal for your service that seemed to animate the entire seraglio.

Your wives have been for a week in the country, [4] to one of your most abandoned houses. It is said that they had suborned the slave who tends them, and that one day before they arrived, he had had two men concealed in a stone recess which is in the walls of the main room, from which they emerged in the evening after we were withdrawn. The old eunuch who is presently in charge of us is an imbecile who is made to believe anything one wants.

I am agitated by a vengeful wrath against so many betrayals ; and if heaven wished, for the good of your service, for you to judge me capable of governing, I promise you that if your wives were not virtuous, at least they would be faithful.

The Isfahan seraglio this 6th day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1719

[1] See letter 139.

[2] Letter 140. Narsit, in letter 141, says he has put that letter away while awaiting Usbek's orders ; it is clear from letter 144 that he has not himself read it. Nearly eighteen months have been lost since the first call to action in letter 139.

[3] See letter 3.

[4] See letter 3.