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The head black eunuch to Usbek in Paris

I am in a quandary I am unable to express to you, magnificent lord. The seraglio is in frightful disorder and chaos, war is raging among your wives, your eunuchs are divided ; I hear nothing but protests, grumbling, and reproaches ; my admonitions are discounted ; anything seems permitted in this time of licence, and I no longer have but a vain title in the seraglio.

There is not one of your wives who does not deem herself above the others in birth, in beauty, in wealth, in her cleverness, in your love, and who does not avail herself of some of those attributes to obtain every preference. I am forever losing the longsuffering patience with which I have nevertheless had the misfortune of provoking them all ; my prudence, even my indulgence, a virtue so rare and so foreign to the position I occupy, have been futile.

Shall I reveal to you, magnificent lord, the cause of all these disorders ? It lies entirely in your heart and in the tender considerations you have for them. If you did not hold back my hand ; if instead of the path of admonition, you allowed me that of punishments ; if, without letting yourself be moved by their protests and tears, you sent them to weep in front of me, who never am never moved, I would soon get them used to the yoke they must wear, and I would wear down their imperious and independent humor.

Abducted at the age of fifteen from darkest Africa, my homeland, I was first quickly to a master who had more than twenty wives or concubines. Having judged from my grave and taciturn demeanor that I was suitable for the seraglio, he ordered that I be made entirely so, and subjected me to an operation that was painful at first but was subsequently to my benefit, because it brought me close to the ear and the confidence of my masters. I entered that seraglio, which was a new world to me ; the principal eunuch, the sternest man I have ever seen, governed it with absolute domination. There was no talk there of divisions or quarrels. A heavy silence prevailed throughout ; all those women were in bed at the same hour from one end of the year to the other, and up at the same hour ; they entered the bath one by one, and exited at the slightest signal from us ; the rest of the time they were almost always locked into their rooms. There was a rule, which was to force them to be very properly attired, and he paid inexpressible attention to that ; the slightest to obey was mercilessly punished. I am a slave, he would say, but I am the slave of a man who is your master and mine, and I am making use of the power he has given me over you : it is he who punishes you, and not I, who do no more than lend my hand. Those women never entered my master's chamber without being called ; they received that favor with joy, and when deprived of it made no complaint. In short I, who was the last of the blacks in that tranquil seraglio, was a thousand times more respected than I am in yours, where I command everyone.

Once this great eunuch had seen my genius, he looked toward me ; he spoke to my master about me as a man capable of working according to his views, and of succeeding him in the post he filled. He was not surprised at my great youth ; he believed that my attention would stand me in stead of experience. What shall I say ? I made such progress in his confidence that he no longer hesitated to entrust to me with the keys of the ominous halls he had been guarding for so long. It was under this great master that I learned the difficult art of commanding, and assimilated the maxims of an inflexible government. Under him I studied women's hearts ; he taught me to take advantage of their weaknesses, and not be surprised at their arrogance. Often he even chose to have me test them, and take them to the last entrenchment of obedience ; then he had them return gradually, and wanted me myself to appear for a while to bend. But you had to see him in those moments when he would find them very near despair between entreaties and reproaches ; he bore their tears without being moved. That, he would say in a contented way, is how women must be

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governed. Their number does not concern me ; I would conduct in the same way all the wives of our great monarch. How can a man hope to capture their hearts if his loyal eunuchs have not first subjected their spirits ?

He had not just firmness, but also insight ; he read their thoughts and their dissimulations. After studying their gestures, their feigned expression concealed nothing from him. He knew all their most hidden acts and their most secret words ; he used some to learn about the others, and cheerfully rewarded every bit of information. As they approached their husband only when they were summoned, the eunuch sent for whomever he wished, and turned his master's eyes on those he had his sights on, and this distinction was the recompense for some secret revealed. He had persuaded his master that it was a question of good order to leave this choice to him, so as to give him greater authority. That, magnificent lord, is the way one governed in a seraglio which was, I think, the best run in Persia.

Give me a free hand ; let me make them obey me : a week will restore order in the bosom of chaos. That is what your glory demands and your security requires.

From your seraglio in Isfahan, this 9th day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1714