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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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### *Zelis to Usbek in Paris*

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Your daughter having reached her seventh year, I thought it was time to transfer her to the inner apartments of the seraglio, and not to wait until she was ten to put her into the hands of the black eunuchs. It is never too early to deprive a young person of the freedoms of childhood and give her a holy education in the sacred walls where modesty dwells.

For I cannot share the opinion of those mothers who enclose their daughters only when they are about to give them a husband ; who sentence them to the seraglio rather than consecrating them to it, make them embrace forcibly a manner of life they should have inspired in them. Must one expect everything from the force of reason, and nothing from the gentleness of habit ? [1]

It is in vain to talk to us about the subordination in which nature has placed us ; it is not enough to make us aware of it, we must be made to practice it, so it will sustain us at that crucial time when the passions begin to arise and urge us toward independence.

If we were attached to you only by duty, we might sometimes forget it ; if we were swept in only by inclination, a stronger inclination might weaken it. But when the laws give us to a man, they hide us from all others, and place us as far from them as if we were a thousand leagues away.

Nature, avid in favor of men, did not limited herself to giving them desires ; she wanted us to have some ourselves, to be active instruments of their felicity ; she put us in the fire of passions so they could live there tranquilly. If they make exception to their insensitivity, she has destined us to force them back in, without ever ourselves enjoying that happy state [2] in which we put them.

Nevertheless, Usbek, do not imagine that your situation is happier than mine. I have tasted here a thousand pleasures that you know not ; my imagination has labored ceaselessly to make me aware of their value ; I have lived, and you have merely languished.

Even in the prison where you keep me, I am freer than you [3] ; you could not redouble your attentions to have me guarded with my enjoying your anxieties, and your suspicions, your jealousy, and your worries are so many signs of your dependency.

Continue, dear Usbek ; have me overseen night and day ; do not even rely on the ordinary precautions ; augment my happiness by insuring yours, and know that the only thing I fear is your indifference.

*The Isfahan seraglio this 2nd day of the moon of Rhebiab II, 1714*

## Letter 60

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[1] An implicit critique less of forced vocations than of violence and constraint.

[2] Thus, according to Zelis, who occupies a particular situation in the seraglio, pleasure is reserved to men - which opposes her to Fatmé or Zachî, rivals in "sensitivity" (letters 3 and 7).

[3] A covert allusion to the licence to which one of the wives secretly abandons herself ? This idea will appear more clearly some days later, in letter 62.