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*Rhedi to Usbek in ****

Yesterday morning I was in bed when I heard a furious knocking at my door, which was suddenly opened, or broken open, by a man with whom I had had some association, and who appeared to me all a-dither.

His dress was much more than modest ; his wig was on crooked and had not even been combed ; he had not had time to have his black doublet repaired ; and for that day he had neglected the wise precautions he usually took to disguise the dilapidated state of his outfit.

Get up, he said, I need you all day today. I have a thousand errands to run, and I would be most pleased if it were with you. First of all we must go to the Rue Saint Honoré to speak with a notary who is handling the sale of a property for five hundred thousand livres [1] : I want him to give me the preference. On my way here I stopped a minute at the Faubourg Saint Germain where I leased a house for two thousand écus, and I hope the contract will be signed today.

As soon as I was dressed, or nearly so, my man rushed me downstairs : Let us first go buy a carriage, and get it equipped right away. Indeed we bought not only a carriage, but also a hundred thousand francs worth of merchandise, in less than an hour ; all this was done expeditiously, because my man did not haggle over anything, and never counted : moreover, he did not transfer any funds. I was musing on all this, and when I examined this man, I found him to be a singular mixture of wealth and poverty, so I did not know what to believe. But finally I broke my silence, and drawing him aside, I said : Monsieur, who will pay for all this ? I shall, he said, come to my room : I will show you immense treasures, and riches envied by the greatest monarchs. But not by you : you will always share them with me. I follow him : we climb to his fifth floor, and with a ladder hoist ourselves to a sixth, which was a small room open to the four winds in which there was nothing but two or three dozen clay basins filled with various liquors. I got up early this morning, he said, and what I did first was what I have been doing for twenty-five years, which is to go check on my great work. [2] I saw that the great day had come that was to make me richer than any man on earth. Do you see this red liquor ? It now possesses all the qualities which the philosophers require to achieve the transmutation of metals. From it I have obtained these grains which you see, who are true gold by their color, although a little imperfect in terms of their weight. That secret which Nicolas Flamel [3] found, but which Raymond Lulle [4] and a million others forever sought, has come down to me, and I am today a successful adept. [5] May heaven make me use such treasures as it has communicated to me only for its glory !

I left the room, and went down or rather threw myself down the stairway, beside myself with rage, and left that wealthy man in his hovel. Adieu, my dear Usbek, I shall come see you tomorrow, and if you wish we will return to Paris together.

Paris this last day of the moon of Rhegeb 1713

[1] At the time, an annual income of 40,000 livres corresponds to the level of aristocratic life ; it is therefore a considerable sum, beyond a bourgeois income which might run from 5,000 to 20,000 livres ; this person considers himself very rich indeed.

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[2] The word *oeuvre* or "great work" has a precise meaning in alchemy, which is the philosopher's stone, or the secret of transforming base metals into precious ones.

[3] Flamel (died in 1418), a famous alchemist said to have grown rich through his discoveries.

[4] Raymond Lulle (1235-1316), Catalan mystic and heretic, author of an *Ars magna*.

[5] From *adeptus* (he who has acquired), the word "is used specifically for those who believe they have achieved the great work" (*Académie*, 1718).