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Fatmé [1] to Usbek in Erzerum

It has been two months since you left, [2] my dear Usbek, and in my present dejection, I still cannot make myself believe it. I circulate through the seraglio as if you were here, and am not disabused. What do you expect a woman who loves you to do, one who was used to holding you in her arms, whose only care was to give you proofs of her affection, free by the privilege of her birth, a slave by the violence of her love ?

When I married you, my eyes had never yet beheld a man's face. You are still the only one I have been allowed to see, [3] for I do not count as men these atrocious eunuchs whose least imperfection is not to be men. When I compare the beauty of your face with the deformity of theirs, I cannot help feeling fortunate ; my imagination offers me no more ravishing thought than the enchanting charms of your person. I swear to you, Usbek, were I allowed to leave this place, where I am confined by necessity of my position ; were I able to evade the guards who surround me ; were I allowed to choose among all the men who live in this capital of nations, Usbek, I swear I would choose none but you : there can be no one but you on earth who deserves to be loved.

Do not think your absence has made me neglect a beauty that you prize : although no one is to see me, and the ornaments I wear are irrelevant to your happiness, I nevertheless strive to maintain the habit of appearing attractive, and do not retire until I have perfumed myself with the most delightful essences. I remember that happy time when you would come into my arms ; a wonderful dream that seduces me brings to me that dear object of my love ; my imagination loses itself in its desires as it flatters itself in its hopes ; I sometimes think that, discouraged by an arduous journey, you will return to us ; the night is spent in dreams that belong neither to wakefulness nor to sleep ; I seek you by my side, and it seems you are fleeing me. Finally the passion that devours me itself disperses these enchantments and reawakens me ; for that moment I feel so excited... You would not believe it, Usbek. It is impossible to live in this state. Fire flows in my veins ; if only I could express to you what I feel so well ; and how can I feel so well what I cannot express to you ? At such moments, Usbek, I would give the world for a single kiss from you. How unfortunate a woman is to have such violent desires when she is deprived of him who alone can satisfy them ; when left to herself, with nothing that can distract her, she must live accustomed to sighs and to the fury of an aroused passion ; when far from being satisfied, she has not even the advantage of serving the felicity of another, useless ornament of a seraglio, kept for honor and not for her husband's pleasure.

How cruel you men are ! You are happy for us to have desires we cannot satisfy ; you treat us as if we were insensate, and you would be most displeased if we were. You think our desires so long suppressed will be aroused at the sight of you ; it takes effort make yourselves loved ; it is quicker to obtain from our temperament what you dare not expect from your merit.

Adieu, my dear Usbek, adieu. Know that I live only to worship you ; my soul is filled with you ; and your absence, far from making me forget you, would excite my love if it could be become more violent.

The Isfahan seraglio this 12th day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1711

Letter 7

[1] The only letter written by Fatmé, third wife of Usbek, as she confirms in this very letter.

[2] Usbek left exactly on 19 March (Maharram).

[3] Persian women are much more closely guarded than Turkish or Indian women [*author's note*].