

# HAREM GIRL



FLETCHINA ARCHER

Harem Girl  
*by Fletchina Archer*

**Renaissance**

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By

**FLETCHINA ARCHER**

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## CHAPTER 1

When Richard's hand slid under her shirt, pushing her bra aside to cup her breast, Theresa liked the sensation it sent through her seventeen-year old body. They were engrossed in a deep, long kiss in the front seat of his car, parked at the end of a gravel access road into a wooded park by the river. She even liked it when his other hand insistently moved up her thigh, under her skirt, and pulled at the elastic of her panties. She slumped in her seat and opened her legs to give his probing fingers easier access. His finger prodded between her labia, penetrated her wet cunt, and began thrusting in and out.

"Let me do it," he pleaded softly into her ear. "You know we are in love."

She reached down and pulled his hand from under her skirt.

"Let's go into the back and make love," he implored.

"You know I can't, Rick. We said we wouldn't. Not 'til we're married. Remember?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"I just don't want to wind up pregnant and living in a trailer house raising a baby while you're off working your minimum wage job, flipping burgers because neither one of us finished high school. That's what's wrong with it."

"I have protection."

"Okay, then, I don't want all the kids looking at me like they look at Mandy."

"Mandy?"

"You know what I mean. Boys talk."

"I wouldn't."

"Well, Mandy didn't think Bob would tell everyone he slept with her either, but he did."

"You know you want it. I can feel how wet you are."

"I don't want every boy in school coming up to me and asking me to fuck him because I fucked you."

"Do you think I'd tell?"

"Yes."

He moved his hand up her thigh again, but this time, her legs were clamped shut.

"Girls talk too, you know," she said.

His hand withdrew from her breast.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Mandy told me you fucked her."

"She told you that?"

"Yes. It was last Friday, when you said the swim team had to practice."

"Are you mad at me? Come on, just this once?"

"Mad? Yes, you couldn't even wait. You have to fuck any girl that opens her legs for you. And no, not until we're married. If you want to fuck me, then wait 'til you get your diploma, get your college degree, and marry me."

"That'll be forever. And school is almost finished this year."

"You know where I'm going."

"You're still going to Greece? Again? Wasn't two summers enough?"

"Yes, I'm going again, and if you wait then we'll see."

He put the key in the ignition and started the engine, backed the car into a "K" turn, and headed toward the Chicago suburbs, spewing gravel under and behind the car.

"You want me to pick you up after your karate class tomorrow night?"

"I guess, whatever."

"You know, you could be spending that time with me instead of shouting and kicking."

"That shouting and kicking makes me feel good. And helps me stay in shape. Sitting around in a car with you doesn't."

"Make you feel good? Or help you keep in shape."

"You figure it out," she answered as he turned the car into the sluggish freeway traffic.

"What does that mean, anyway, Flying Yoni?"

"The name of the dojo? To put it in words you might understand, "Flying Pussy."

"Pussy karate? I thought it was supposed to be macho, not pussy."

"It's too complicated to explain. Read the book sometime. If you take this exit you can avoid some of the traffic."

"I know where I'm going."

"Whatever."

"So, about tomorrow night..."

"I'll take the train. Forget it. You can practice swimming with Mandy."

\* \* \* \*

In spite of the pleasant aroma of baking, the feeling of boring desperation overwhelmed Theresa the moment she

stepped into the sprawling one level ranch style house her family occupied.

"How's it going?" her dad asked without looking up from the television. A newspaper was piled on the floor beside his recliner.

"Okay," she said.

"Hi, honey," her mom enthused from the kitchen. "I just finished these." She indicated a growing pile of chocolate chip cookies. "More in the oven," she added as she continued taking cookies from the baking sheets and putting them onto the platter. "Help yourself, dear. Did you get some supper? The cookies are for Tina's scout meeting. It's my turn to do refreshments, but I doubled the batch so there would be some for you and Dad."

"Yeah. Got a burger with Rick."

"He's such a nice boy."

"I guess. I don't know."

"Easy there, honey, it looks like you're putting on some weight. You might want to slow down on those cookies."

Her dad was always busy at the restaurant; when he was home, he never looked at her. Her mom was always making a real estate deal or baking cookies. Or drinking if dad was somewhere else.

"Mom," Theresa cried in desperation.

*Why do I let her do this to me? Every time. Every fucking time. She sets me up and then springs a trap. 'Have a cookie,' 'You're too fat.'*

The familiar thoughts echoed through her mind as Theresa rushed to the bedroom she shared with her younger sister, Tina.

"That girl. I just don't know..." her mom said to her dad as he surfed the channels.

*It's not like I can't see myself in all the mirrors. I know I have thunder thighs and a fat butt and my boobs are too big. I know I'm grotesque.*

More familiar words echoed through her mind.

She wondered briefly where Tina was, until she remembered that her thirteen-year old sister was sleeping over with a friend.

*I'll be so glad to be out of this fucking house. One more year. I can stand anything for a year. Not even a whole year. After finals, Greece! Freedom. At least Dad and I agree on one thing. He doesn't speak a word of Greek, always hated it because the old people spoke it. But he likes the idea of my learning it, going to Greece in the summers. He's willing to pay for it, and I'm not here to annoy Mom.*

She took off her skirt and top and stood in front of the mirror in her bra and panties to let her eyes confirm what her mind had told her, that she was grotesque.

She threw a karate kick at the image in the mirror. In the confined space between the bunk beds and the desks, she began practicing katas, the choreographed sequences of karate moves that students learn. She was working on the last one she needed to perform for her black belt.

Her face contorted in concentration. She focused on the imaginary opponents that came at her from all sides in the



sequenced moves of the stories handed down from teacher to student, ever since whoever first kicked the butts of this many bad guys swarming from all directions. She had to remind herself to relax into the situation. Let her body respond. Relax. Punch, punch, kick, turn, parry, kick.

A sheen of sweat glistened on her body when she finally stopped, the anger at her mom and disgust with her dad dissipated for the moment.

The night was hot and clammy. The air-conditioner had been out of commission since the end of the previous summer.

Theresa turned off the light and climbed into the top bunk to unfasten her bra and strip off her panties so she could lie naked on the sheet. As she was drifting into sleep, images invaded her mind.

*Rick's finger was separating her labia.*

She woke up with a shudder. *Yuck. That was more annoying than anything else. I don't know why I let him do it.*

*Oh yes, I do know. It's because I'm hoping it will be something nice. Something like...*

More images washed over her as she opened her legs to receive the stroking of her finger.

*A night like this one. Hot and clammy. An overnight with her friend Angela. They were both nearly thirteen. Uncomfortable, they squirmed out of their nightgowns and looked at each other's bodies in the whiteness of the moonlight that flooded the room. They giggled as they touched their own budding breasts, then each other's and commented on the fuzz that they knew was becoming grown-*

*up pubic hair. They hugged each other, an innocent and chaste hug.*

The images accompanied her finger as it slowly circled her clitoris. As her clitoris became larger and harder, she stroked across its top. When it was as big and hard as a pencil eraser, she stroked the underside with the tip of her finger until she began to quiver and moan in accompaniment with the image of Angela's hug.

That hug lingered in the recesses of Theresa's mind and came forward when she played herself, times like tonight when she couldn't sleep, or mornings she woke up with her cunt dripping from a dream she couldn't remember. She usually had to be quiet so as to not alert her bratty sister.

*Part of my grotesqueness.* The thought came unbidden as she drifted to sleep. *I masturbate all the time. Worse, I think about Angela when I masturbate. At school I sometimes wonder what it would be like to be naked with another girl. Or Ms. Johnson, the English teacher. That's so many kinds of sin ... I don't even know their names.*

\* \* \* \*

The next morning at the kitchen table Theresa found her dad behind a newspaper and her mom standing by the phone consulting her date book.

"And then I have a showing at one, and a meeting at two. That'll be finished by three-thirty. Are you listening, dear?"

"Yeah, you have some work today."

Theresa couldn't understand how these two could have ever been involved in sex. She looked in wonder at her mom,

a trim woman in her late forties, and her dad, once athletic but now gone to fat, a few years older. She couldn't imagine either one of them naked. She found it difficult to imagine her dad with a penis or her mom opening her legs for anyone or anything.

*How the hell did we get here?* Her mind marveled as perhaps some miracle had happened, like something they heard about in their infrequent visits to the Eastern Orthodox Church. When she had to say what religion she was, she always said, "Catholic." It was easier that way. She didn't have to deal with, "What's Eastern Orthodox?"

"You need a car?" her dad asked as Theresa poured milk into her bowl of cereal. He lowered the paper to acknowledge her presence.

"No, thanks, Dad. I'll take the train."

"Take the car. You know I don't like you taking the train."

"Too much trouble to drive and park a car. Why don't you like me riding the train? Everybody else rides the train."

"Including muggers and rapists. It's too dangerous."

"Dad" she said in exasperation. "I am nearly a black belt in karate. I would love for some muggers or rapists to even try to touch me. I'm just waiting for a chance to do something more than perform katas and spar in tournaments. I would love to beat the living shit out of some low life son of a bitch that tried to lay a hand on me."

"Watch your language, young lady," her mom cautioned.

"Take the car," her dad said more insistently.

"No, thanks."

"Okay, have it your way," he said retreating to the sports section.

"Well, I'll be driving my car. I can give you a lift, honey. Are you going to your gym today?"

"It's a *dojo*, Mom."

"Yes, dear. If you're going to that gym you like so much, I can drop you off. Then you would only have to ride the train back."

The phone rang just as Theresa was about to explain she would be at the dojo all day to prepare for a tournament.

"It's that nice boy, honey, Rick?"

"Tell him I'm not here."

Her mother lowered the phone and looked at Theresa in mock dismay.

"You want me to *lie* to him?"

*Hell, Mom, you lie about everything else. Why not?*

"Tell him I can't come to the phone, then."

"She'll call right back, Rick," her mom said into the phone. She replaced the phone in the cradle and closed her date book.

"That's it, then, I'm ready. Call that boy, honey, then let's go."

"I'll call on the way from your cell phone, okay?"

"Sure, honey."

In the car, Theresa's mom handed her the cell phone. Theresa dialed some numbers and said, "Hello, Rick? Rick? You're breaking up. I'll have to call later." That satisfied her mom.

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"Well, just don't forget. It's important to keep appointments, even ones to call people."

Theresa turned on the radio. Her mother turned the volume down and said over the thudding of the music, "You really do have to start watching your weight, dear. Things like that can get away from you before you know it. When you go to college..."

Theresa slumped in her seat and tried to hunker down to endure the onslaught she knew would last until they reached the Flying Yoni. There was no kata to combat this kind of assault, no combination of kicks, turns, or punches that would deflect it. She could only hope the armor she'd developed over the years would continue to be effective protection.

## CHAPTER 2

"There's a ferry. Take the ferry," the mustachioed boat captain said.

"I told you, the ferry's not running and I *can't* stay here in Athens. I need to get to Rhodes today, to meet my host family."

"Your Greek is good. American?"

"How did you know?"

"Your clothes, the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you cut your hair ... everything screams 'American.'"

"Please, can you take me?"

"They're predicting a storm."

"That's what the ferry boat people said, but I *can't* stay here. I don't have enough money for a hotel. I *promised* I'd be there today."

"Okay, okay, I will take you. Come aboard." A wide smile split his face. "But it will cost more than the ferry boat."

"As long as it's less than the hotel and we get there today."

"Okay, okay."

Theresa stepped onto the fishing boat and the captain began the ritual of casting off from the dock.

Clouds gathered on the horizon as the boat putted through the harbor and out to sea. When the rain began, Theresa sought refuge on the bench in the cabin.

"Don't worry, we'll be okay," the skipper said, smiling again.

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The rain pelted the boat and the swells tossed the vessel higher. Land was nowhere in sight. All Theresa could see was blinding sheets of rain. All she could feel was her guts in an uproar after the all day flight from O'Hare where her sister and parents had taken her, when? Ages ago it seemed. Maybe a day. She hadn't slept since.

"These summer storms, they come, they go," the skipper said.

The engine sputtered ominously. Theresa tried to keep her stomach under control—a battle she knew she was losing. She staggered out of the cabin and onto the deck, leaned over the railing and heaved her guts out.

"Ah, feeding the fish," said the skipper. "Happens all the time. Not to worry. Where did you learn Greek anyway, an American girl?"

"My parents are Greek. And there's a class in my school."

The captain looked over his shoulder at Theresa's blonde hair blowing in the wind as she tried in vain to wipe her chin with her wrist, and didn't see the wave that towered above the boat. When she did see it there was nothing she could do. She braced herself just before the wave washed over the boat.

There was a deafening explosion of thunder and Theresa saw the lightening strike the mast, playing down the length of it. The last thing she heard was another blast of thunder just behind her.

\* \* \* \*

A foot prodded Theresa awake. She lay on the beach clothed in the remains of the shirt and shorts she had worn from O'Hare. The rain had stopped and the waves were calmer now.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Rhodes."

"Where's the boat?"

"What boat? My boat? It's pulled up over there. Where I always pull up when I'm done fishing."

"The one that brought me here. You're not the same guy."

"There was no boat. You are where you are and as you are."

The dark haired man's face lit up with a broad smile as he looked down on Theresa and asked, "Who is your father?"

She could barely understand his Greek. The vowels were strange—all wrong. In a back chamber of her exhausted mind, she wondered if the Greek of the Islands could be that different. She could only guess at the meanings of the words.

"My father?"

"Yes. Who is he and where is he from?"

"Why do you want to know that?"

"Where are you from anyway? You speak outlandishly."

"I'm from Chicago."

"Shee Ka Go?" I thought I knew all these islands, but I never heard of that one.

"It's not an island. It's in the United States."

"The what?"

"You've heard of America?"



"Amerika? No, is that another island? Or is it maybe inland? Up close to Macedonia maybe? Where is this village close to?"

"It's not a village, it's a country."

"Just tell me who your father is and where he lives so I can get you home to your family."

"Where are we?"

"Rhodes. I thought I told you. In the Ottoman Empire."

"The what?"

"It's an island in the empire of the Ottoman Turks."

"Not in Greece?"

"Yes, but Greece. That's one area of the Ottoman Empire. Don't you know anything? They rule everything these days. Ah, at least for the past few hundred years. Before that..."

Theresa looked at her watch to see what day it was. Her wrist was empty.

"What day is this?"

"Thursday."

"What year?"

"1091. Why? Where have you been all year?"

"Ottoman Empire? Is that the Islamic date? What's the Christian date?"

"Most Greeks are Christian and we follow our Orthodox calendar, but the official calendar is the Islamic one. Yes. Christian system ... let me think ... I'd guess it's about 1680. Maybe a little more, maybe a little less. Almost a thousand and seven hundred years after our Savior."

Theresa tried to take it all in. It wasn't going easily. The man folded his arms across his chest as he regarded Theresa quizzically.

"If you don't tell me who your father is and where he lives, I'm going to take you to Stavros, the merchant, the slave dealer."

"What did you say?"

"Slave dealer." He said slowly and deliberately, articulating each syllable so there would be no doubt. "You either belong to a family, or you're a slave. If you don't tell me who your family is...."

Theresa collapsed into the sand. She was exhausted from jet lag, her energy spent from the voyage from the mainland to get to her host family on Rhodes, weakened by sea sickness, the storm, exposure to sea and sun, and now this."

She felt the firm pressure of his hands lifting her to her feet. Her shirt was in ribbons, but her bra and shorts were intact. Her shoes were gone.

"Come on, come with me. We'll see what Stavros says. You must be from a rich family."

"Why do you say that?" she managed to croak.

"Only rich people don't work. There are no calluses on your hands. No calluses means no work. No work means rich."

She leaned on the stranger's arm as he guided her gently into the village, through the streets between the white houses, and to the house of Stavros.

\* \* \* \*

Theresa only vaguely overheard the conversation between the men inside the cool house. She wanted nothing more than to sleep.

"Greetings, Fisherman, what have you brought me today? Something fresh for supper?"

"Only if you eat mermaids. Look what I found on the beach when I pulled my boat ashore."

"Who is her father?" Stavros asked as the boys and women in the stone house stopped their bustling work to appraise the new arrival.

"She wouldn't say, but look at her hands—she must be from a rich family."

"You found her on the beach? Can she talk?"

"She talks, but she's from some distant island. She sounds more like a mainlander from way up north. Says she's from someplace called Shee Ka Go or Amerika. Yes I found her on the beach."

Theresa's legs felt rubbery. When she staggered, the man who found her grasped her shoulders and held her up.

"What's she wearing? Did you ever see clothes like that?"

"Who knows what they wear in the north?"

An older woman, dressed in black passed, through the room. "Look at those hips! She's not a country girl! She must be from a city family."

Stavros motioned with his chin to one of the younger women leaning against the wall. "Wash her. Get her some decent clothes."

The young dark haired woman smiled up at Theresa, took her by the elbow and led her to a courtyard behind the house.

As she peeled the remnants of the shirt from her, the woman said, "I'm Penelope. What is your name?"

"Theresa."

Theresa was dimly aware that this young woman was about her awkward age. Too grown up to be a girl, too young to yet be a woman.

"That's a Greek name. So where is this place you are from? Don't worry. Look at my hands. I'm Stavros's daughter. I'm a rich girl, too. You can tell me about your family."

Theresa could barely keep up with the conversation. She knew she'd never stand a chance of explaining. "I'm from up north."

"I never saw anything like this ... What?"

To Theresa's exhausted eyes, Penelope was only a substantial blur. The combination of voice tone, facial expression, and shrugging shoulders communicated to her that she was puzzled by Theresa's clothing. Theresa removed her bra and stepped out of her shorts. Four girls giggled and peaked from inside the house. Several boys peered over their shoulders into the courtyard.

"What..." Penelope examined the zipper. "Where? How..."

She studied the bra's fasteners with equal curiosity before she bundled the clothes and tossed them into a corner of the walled courtyard. She pulled the elastic of Theresa's panties in puzzlement. When Theresa stepped out of them, the woman tossed them into the pile.

In one corner of the courtyard a woman was using a wooden handle to rhythmically turn a circular stone set into a larger slab of stone. Theresa was too exhausted to be curious.

"You," the woman working the millstone shouted, to a young girl in the courtyard, "Go get her a chiton."

One of the girls ducked into another wing of the house and reappeared with a folded cloth. She stared open eyed at Theresa's naked body as Penelope got a dipper and started pouring water over the strange gift from the sea.

"Bring me a sponge," Penelope ordered the girl, and a sponge appeared.

After she'd washed the salt and sand from Theresa's body, Penelope stood back and looked at her with frank admiration. "Here, put this on," she said, handing Theresa the folded cloth.

"Uh ... how do I..." Theresa stammered.

Penelope unfolded a sack-like garment, opened the bottom, and pulled it over Theresa's body 'til her head emerged from the hole in the top. Then she tied a sash around her waist.

"We need to comb your hair. It's all tangled."

Penelope guided Theresa into the cool dimness of the house and sat her down on a straw mattress atop a wooden bed.

"I think you need some rest. We'll comb your hair later."

### CHAPTER 3

The sun shone brightly when Theresa awoke from her coma-like sleep. She lay on her back and tried to remember how she'd come to be in the house of this Greek slave dealer.

*I was coming to Greece for another summer to get better with the language and live with a family on Rhodes. There was no ferryboat from Athens because of storm warnings. I hired a boat. There was a storm, lightening hit the boat at least twice. A fisherman found me on the beach and brought me here.*

She swiveled her feet to the floor and stood up to stretch.

"Good, you're up in time for lunch. Come on out and eat," Penelope said from the doorway to the room.

In one corner of the courtyard was a table shaded by a grapevine growing up the wall and over a trellis. Theresa joined Penelope and the boys and girls, as well as three older women, as they dipped pieces of flat bread into a pot of steaming seafood stew.

"You slept all day, all night, and half of today," Penelope said.

"Jetlag," Theresa answered.

The other people at the table looked at Penelope in puzzlement.

"I thought she spoke our language," said one of the old women.

"She's from way up north, auntie. They speak differently up there," Penelope answered. "Sometimes they use words

different from ours. I think she was trying to say something like, 'good food,' weren't you?" the dark haired woman said turning to Theresa with a smile.

"Exactly. I used the northern word. I forgot that here we say, 'good food.'" Everyone smiled. Theresa was content to let the animated conversation wash over her without understanding much of it except that it was fast, loud, and seemed to be good natured.

One of the aunties took Theresa's hand and looked appreciatively at her palm. The old woman smiled, showing several missing teeth. She put Theresa's finger on the hardened calluses of her own hand. "Millstone," she said, pointing to the round stone in the corner.

When Theresa looked up she saw Penelope's gaze fixed on her. Theresa looked down at the bread on the table, tore off another piece, and dipped it into the pot of stew. She felt the gaze still on her face as she chewed.

"Father wants to see you after you've eaten, but let's comb your hair first. Hektor, go get my comb and bring some oil."

The slight twelve-year-old boy looked up and smiled.

"Go, go," the older girl commanded.

"Where is your mom? Isn't she the one in charge?" Theresa asked.

"She died when Hektor was born."

Hektor sauntered into another wing of the house. When he emerged, he handed Penelope a tortoise shell comb and a small gourd. The aunties got up and told the children to clean up after the meal.

Penelope shooed Hektor away and stood behind Theresa to massage the scented oil into her thick blond hair. As she did, she intoned a rhythmic verse, half song, half poem:

Like a drum, salt and honey  
Quivering in my thighs  
He is shaking my whole body again  
This animal that walks on all fours  
This Eros.

"That's beautiful," Theresa said, wincing slightly as the comb pulled on a knot in her hair. "Is that a poem?"

"Sort of. It's by Sappho. Do people know her in the north? She lived in the islands long ago."

"Sappho?"

"The poet and teacher from Lesbos"

"Oh, yes," Theresa said with a blush. "We've even heard of her up north. She's the one who..." Theresa couldn't find the right words.

"On her island they had a community of young women. Sappho was a teacher. People sent their daughters to spend a couple of years with her. When they went back home, Sappho would make a wedding song for them for when they married."

"Wasn't she the one who..." Again Theresa's vocabulary would not stretch to fit what she wanted to say.

"...taught more than poetry?" Penelope finished for her. "Yes, she taught women to enjoy their bodies with each other."

Penelope's hand, moist with oil, gently caressed the back of Theresa's neck, as though in passing, before she resumed



her combing. The comb glided through the oiled strands of hair.

"Are you married yet?"

"No. There's a boy back home who..." The image of Rick flashed into Theresa's mind.

"You're in love with him? He makes your thighs quiver?"

"He'd like to think so, but no. No one has made my thighs quiver like a drum."

Again Penelope chanted in a soft cadence:

Like a honey-apple turning red

Up on the highest branch that the apple pickers missed.

No, they didn't miss it, they couldn't reach it.

Theresa turned around and looked at Penelope. "Are you married?"

"No, and I don't want to be. Father's not happy about that, but it's just that nobody has made me feel that way. No boys anyway..." She let the sentence drift upward into the clear blue sky. "I went to a school when I was fifteen to learn to read and write and play the lyre and to learn poetry."

"Like Sappho's school?"

"Yes, I learned lots more too. And even got a wedding song. But ... I was there two years, and now I'm home. I've been here for a month and I miss my school more than I ever missed being at home. Father says I should think about getting married, but ... Come, Father wants to see you." Penelope interlaced her fingers through Theresa's and walked with her into the house.

\* \* \* \*

Coming in from the brightness outside, Theresa could only vaguely make out the white clad shapes within.

"You look better today," a deep voice said. "If you tell us who your father is, we can try to get news to him. I know I'd want news if my Penelope washed up on a strange beach. My ships go everywhere."

"Ships full of slaves?" Theresa challenged.

"Not at all. I haven't ever had enough slaves to fill a ship. Just a few now and then, and those are mostly from people who sell their children into slavery. I make sure they're better off than I found them. One of those slaves left here when he was no more than five. He's now one of the chief accountants of the empire and answers only to the Grand Vizier. I think life in the imperial palace in Istanbul is better than life in the pigsty he came from, don't you?

"But most of my trade is in cotton, cloth, wine, and wheat. Some olives, some oil. Basic things people in the cities need."

Stavros circled Theresa, looking at her from head to toe.

"Take off her chiton," he told Penelope.

Theresa remained stock still as Penelope obligingly lifted the garment over her head.

"Good," Stavros said, circling the girl again. "Large, firm breasts, slim waist, ample hips, good thighs. Not much here, though," he said, indicating her belly. "Maybe if she gets some good food she will fill out a bit. Then she'd be just right for the Sultan. He likes shapely young women like this."

"He's making fun of me, isn't he?" Theresa whispered to Penelope. Theresa didn't know the words for "thunder thighs,"

or "fat butt," and she knew she had to work plenty hard to keep her stomach as flat as it was, and it wasn't that flat.

"No, he's absolutely right. I'll explain later. It's okay. Don't worry," Penelope answered in a low voice. "And you can explain to me about your clothes."

"Milos," Stavros said, "When's the next ship going to Izmir?"

"About a week. As soon as it's loaded."

"Can you take this one along? Give her to the governor there. Suggest to him she's meant as a gift for the Sultan."

"Good idea. Most of our trade is with Izmir these days, and it never hurts to have the governor for a friend. If the Sultan likes her ... Good idea."

Milos had abundant curly black hair and a moustache. His body was trim, compact, muscular. Theresa saw his arms ripple as he crossed them over his chest and look at her with an appreciative smile.

"None of that, Milos. She's for the Sultan."

"Yes, sir."

When Theresa tried to see where the giggling was coming from, she saw Hektor in the middle of an indistinct gaggle of boys and girls from five to twelve years old, she guessed.

Milos added, "It's even better to have the Sultan for a friend. Don't worry, sir, nothing will happen to her while I'm in charge."

"Can we go now?" Penelope asked respectfully.

"Yes, go on. We'll let you know when it's time to go to Izmir."

\* \* \* \*

"This is so exciting," Penelope enthused as the two young women went through the courtyard to the other wing of the house where Theresa had passed out. "You'll get to go to Izmir and Istanbul and be an odalisque."

"Be a what?"

"Odalisque. A woman in the Sultan's harem. That's the best place to be. What can a girl like me expect? Marry some sea captain like Milos, have babies, and grow old like the aunties and work in the kitchen. Work a millstone to grind wheat into flour. There's no future in that."

"Harem?"

"In the palace. Don't you know about the empire up north? They don't speak Greek in Izmir or Istanbul. They speak Turkish, but you'll pick it up. I only know a little, but it's an interesting language. They write using Arabic, not Greek letters like we use. Arabic script is very different, but beautiful from the examples I've seen."

"Palace?"

"That's where the Sultan and everyone who rules the empire lives. In Istanbul. People say it's the most beautiful place ever built. As big as it's own city within a city. And you won't have to worry about a husband."

"Husband?" Theresa sat on the bed, exhausted from the effort of trying to keep up with the fast paced conversation. She felt ashamed that she could only answer in single words, and each of them a question. She felt faint at the prospect of never seeing her own parents again because of this ... This what? Time warp?

"As I was saying. In the harem you won't have to worry about a husband. You'll be surrounded by the most beautiful women of the empire. What I wouldn't give to be there."

"An odalisque?"

"Have you ever ... you know ... been with a man?"

Penelope sat beside Theresa and took her hand.

"No." Theresa answered. Fear of pregnancy, fear of gossip, fear ... and with the likes of Rick...

"Neither have I. But women? That's a different story."

"What's an odalisque?"

"Think of it! The Sultan's harem!"

"But aren't harem women slaves?"

"Yes. But so is the Grand Vizier. So are all of the people who rule the empire. The ones who decide where the next war will be, the next conquest, who rule the seas and the lands."

"Slaves?"

"Of course. You are from some backward place, aren't you?"

"I guess..."

"Do people in the north kiss?"

"Sometimes ... if they're with someone they like."

"Do you like me?"

"Yes."

Penelope pulled Theresa toward her and turned to face the blond girl and kiss her full on the lips.

Theresa sputtered. "I've never kissed a-another ... a girl."

"Nice, isn't it?" Penelope answered, kissing her again gently. This time Theresa responded.

"Yes, it is nice. What did they teach you in that school you went to?"

"Let's take off our clothes and I'll show you."

"I don't know ... what if people hear us or come in here? They'll know..."

"It's okay. Nobody minds. They know I like girls. Girls are supposed to like girls. Everyone does it till they get married. Don't worry, there's nothing wrong with it. Do people in the north think it's bad or something?"

"I guess..."

"What about boys? Don't the young men fuck the boys in the north?"

"No." Theresa was shocked at the casual frankness of this conversation.

"How do they learn about sex?"

Theresa was glad Penelope stood and lifted the chiton over her head to end the conversation. She stood naked in front of Theresa, her body sun tanned, her breasts, belly, and thighs firm and full. She pulled Theresa to her feet by her hands and lifted the hem of her garment. Theresa pulled it the rest of the way over head. Penelope hugged her.

For the first time, Penelope felt a woman's breasts against her own, felt a woman's touch on her hips and thighs.

"What if they hear us?"

"They already know what we're doing in here. Don't worry."

Theresa had sometimes had vague longings for other girls. That image of Angela and the innocent sleepover often came back to her when she masturbated, and she recalled vividly

her diffuse feelings of desire for the English teacher, Ms. Johnson

*How can I explain it to this girl? She knows what she's doing. She's beautiful and talented. How can I explain how I felt when Rick put his hand inside my panties and slipped his finger into my cunt. It didn't feel that good. It wasn't like when I did it myself.*

Theresa stammered, "I ... uh ... I..."

"Don't worry. You don't have to say anything. Just relax."

*That's what they always tell me in karate. Just relax. When you relax everything works out.*

Theresa willed herself to relax as she lay down with the firm guidance of Penelope's strong brown arms.

Penelope's tongue softly touched Theresa's lips as her fingers hovered just above her thighs the tips just barely touching Theresa's skin. Theresa sighed and relaxed her legs. Her knees fell to either side, opening to Penelope's touch. But Penelope didn't go there. Instead, she brought goose flesh to Theresa's arms by brushing her fingers along the underside of her breast. When the fingers reached the nipple, they circled it lightly until it stood erect. Then Penelope took the nipple between her lips and went around it deliberately and slowly with her tongue.

"Do northern girls play with themselves?" Penelope whispered.

Theresa could only nod.

"Show me."

Willingly, Theresa opened her labia with the long finger of her right hand and dipped it into the fluid that flowed freely

inside her. Her eyes on Penelope's, Theresa circled her erect clitoris with the tip of her finger, then found the tender underside that always made her shudder. As Theresa began to tremble, Penelope kissed her again on the lips until Theresa sighed deeply and let her hand fall limply to her side.

Penelope stroked Theresa's hair, her breasts, her thighs. In a few minutes, when Theresa opened her eyes, Penelope said, "Sit up and lean against the wall behind you."

Theresa rearranged her body so that she was sitting on the narrow bed with her feet on the floor.

"Now," Penelope said as she knelt between Theresa's knees, "Drape your knees over my shoulders. Good. Like that."

Penelope found Theresa's engorged clitoris with her tongue and circled it unhurriedly but firmly with the tip of her tongue.

"Oh," Theresa sighed, "I'm about to..."

Penelope pressed her tongue decisively down on Theresa's clit until the quaking in her thighs subsided, then she touched the tip of her tongue to the underside of Theresa's glistening clitoris. She moved her tongue down the length of the clitoris, almost as if she weren't touching it at all. When Theresa's thighs began to vibrate again, Penelope clamped her tongue onto her clitoris until the tremors passed. She moved her tongue more firmly from the mouth of Theresa's vagina along the line where Penelope knew her clitoris's root was buried beneath the pink flesh and slowly proceeded to the tip. This time, when Theresa's thighs and stomach began to shake, Penelope moved her tongue quickly up and down on the underside of her clitoris until Theresa's whole body was



overcome with a paroxysm that shook the bed. Theresa moaned and gurgled, and finally screamed in delight.

Theresa's whole body went limp as she tried to extend herself on the bed. Penelope stroked her hair.

Theresa gasped, "They had to hear that outside."

"I told you it doesn't matter." Penelope kissed her gently to stop the words.

"You learned that in school?"

"Um hum."

"They don't teach *that* in the schools up north. We *never* learned anything like that."

"Don't worry. They have their own schools in the Sultan's harem. You'll learn more than you ever thought a person could know."

"How do you know about the harem?"

"My mother's sister, Auntie, who was with us at lunch? She was an odalisque."

"They let her free?" Theresa asked in dismay.

"Unless you become one of the Sultan's favorites, most of the odalisques leave after nine years. Men like them for wives because they're so skilled in..."

"Doing this?" Theresa's vagina was still vibrating with aftershocks.

"Um hum, but also reading, writing, playing instruments, organizing things, just very skilled, very intelligent women."

"The men don't mind that they've been sleeping with the Sultan?"

"He never sleeps with most of them. That's why when you get there, it's important for you to become one of his favorites. Then your son could be the next Sultan."

"Oh, I don't even want to think about that. You've just shown me something I never imagined and now you're asking me to think of something else I can't imagine."

A shadow crossed the door. Hektor asked, "Have you seen Stamos here? Father said he was looking for me." The boy looked frankly and openly at the two naked women.

"He hasn't been here," Penelope answered.

"Who is Stamos?" Theresa asked as Hektor left.

"Hektor's lover. He's about twenty. Handsome too."

"You mean he ... they..."

"They are lovers," she said matter of factly.

Before Theresa could absorb this, Penelope said, "Let's go for a swim."

"I've seen too much of the beach for a while."

"Come on, it'll be fun."

"I don't know if I can even walk, much less swim," Theresa sighed. "After that. Nothing like that has ever happened to me before."

Penelope pulled the other girl to her feet and embraced her. They helped each other into their chitons and went through the courtyard to the back gate, then followed a lane to the beach.

"What's that up on the hill?" Theresa pointed to the fortress like structure.

"That's from the crusader times. Long ago, European knights had a castle here, until the Ottomans took the island about three hundred years ago."

"Gee, a lot of history here."

Penelope was holding Theresa's hand with affection.

"How does that poem go? 'Like a drum, salt and honey, quivering in my thighs, shaking my whole body again ... something about Eros?'"

"Eros," Theresa said, "the pagan god of love, before Christianity."

"Well," Theresa laughed, "Now my thighs have shaken. I like it." She turned to embrace Penelope. "Thanks."

"We're not finished yet. That was just the first lesson."

When they reached the beach, Penelope took off her chiton but Theresa hesitated.

"What if someone sees us?"

"What, you think they've never seen naked girls before? The only reason to wear clothes at all is for comfort. Everyone sees everyone naked all the time."

With that she waded into the cool water and floated on her back, her face, breasts, and thighs breaking the surface.

Naked, Theresa followed her.

## CHAPTER 4

During the week of daily and nightly lovemaking with Penelope, Theresa learned more than she ever imagined possible about the arts of eros, poetry, and even some elementary Turkish. The two girls walked hand in hand down the lane from Stavros's house to the dock where his ship was almost loaded.

"We'll sail on tomorrow's tide," said Milos, the captain who was supervising the porters busily loading the giant ship.

To Theresa it looked like a pirate ship from a movie. It had three levels in the back, one in front, and a lower part in the middle. There were three masts. The back one held a triangular sail and the forward two held two square sails each. A rope braced the front mast to a spit that protruded from the rounded front of the ship. The sailors were climbing up the ropes and gathering up the sails to tie them in place.

"It's what the Turks call a *caramusal*," Milos explained with pride. "I've heard that the Europeans have ships something like this, but call them *galleons*. Did you ever see them up north?"

"We weren't that close to the sea," Theresa explained, doubting that a galleon had ever called at Chicago. She felt more comfortable with the island dialect of Greek.

"Used to be pirates out of here," Milos commented, almost wistfully. "Until the Turks. Only honest merchants for the past couple of hundred years."

"When's the tide tomorrow?" Penelope asked.

"Before sunrise."

"We'll be back then."

"Oh yes, the present for the Governor of Izmir." Milos smiled broadly.

"No," Penelope corrected him, "for the Sultan."

"By way of the governor."

"By way of the governor," the dark haired girl agreed.

As the two girls turned to return to the merchant's house, Theresa took Penelope's hand in hers and smiled. "You've been a great teacher. And I think we may have time for a little bit of practice before the ship leaves."

Penelope returned her smile and squeezed her hand in assent.

\* \* \* \*

The ship groaned and creaked at its moorings in the pre-dawn darkness as the two girls approached it.

Milos stood at the gangplank noting every person and thing that came aboard his ship. Stavros stood behind him, verifying the cargo.

"No baggage for Theresa?" Milos asked.

"What baggage did she come with?" Stavros asked with a smile.

"That reminds me," Penelope whispered to Theresa, "You were going to tell me about those strange fasteners in the clothes you were wearing when you washed up on our shore. How do they make such small pieces of metal?"

Theresa squeezed the island woman's hand, looked deeply into her eyes, and said, "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you

no lies. Please, it's complicated. Things in the north are different. Many things. Will you ever visit me in Istanbul? I mean, if I get there?"

"Even the Janissaries won't be able to keep me away. I will visit you. Don't worry. By then you'll be giving me lessons in the arts of eros."

The two embraced and Theresa boarded the ship under the watchful eyes of Milos and Stavros. Tears filled Penelope's eyes, but she felt happy for her friend because she knew Theresa would go far at the court of the Sultan. She felt a pang of envy at the thought, wishing she could be on the ship instead. But she was a dark haired island girl, not a beautiful northerner like this girl. Some day she would visit. Some day...

Looking back over her shoulder, Penelope saw Theresa waving to her as the crew cast off the lines at Milos's barked orders.

"Let's go home, daughter," Stavros said, taking her by the elbow. "Your friend will do well at court."

"I hope so. I taught her the little Turkish I know. She's quick with languages. Did you notice how normal she sounded the last couple of days?"

"I didn't talk to her that much," Stavros said, his mind already occupied with other things.

\* \* \* \*

The wind filled the sails and the ship slid through the smooth sea with a hissing sound. The sails billowed and the ropes clacked in the wind. The officers shouted at the crew in

Greek, and if they responded, most of the crewmen spoke Turkish. Each understood the other's language well enough to manage the complexities of a sailing ship.

"Who are these toddlers?" Theresa asked Milos as he stared intently at the sea ahead of the swiftly moving ship.

"What toddlers?"

She pointed to the dozen naked, obviously male children a nanny was herding on the deck.

"Janissaries."

"What? I thought those were soldiers."

"The Sultan takes one of every five male children from all of the Western provinces. They're raised by Turkish families, grow up speaking Turkish, and when they are grown, they become the next generation of Janissaries, the infantry of the Empire. They are what keeps the wealth moving in this Empire."

"How's that?"

"They conquer new lands. New lands mean more taxes, more trade, more wealth for everyone. It's a good system."

"Even if they take a fifth of the boy children?"

"Ah, most people have more kids than they know what to do with. You should see them coming to Stavros with the extras, selling them for some food or money. The life of a Janissary is better than the life of a poor islander."

"I thought you said it was a good system. How does a good system have poor people?"

Milos never diverted his gaze from the sea. "You ask too many questions. Truly it is written that you cannot help another. Each person has a fate to live out. Rich, poor, man,

woman ... each must live that fate. It has nothing to do with Janissaries or the Empire or anything else. Fate. It is your fate to be a gift to the Sultan, to live the fabled life of the harem. Who can question it? You live it because it is your fate."

When the ship arrived in the bustling port, Milos was the first one off to meet the representative the harbormaster sent to the docks as soon as the sails were spotted. After their brief chat and the transfer of a heavy purse, the representative returned to the harbormaster's building only to return shortly with another official.

Milos beckoned from the dock for Theresa to join him.

"Your honor," Milos said to the representative who translated from Greek to Turkish, "I have the honor to present to you a gift for the governor, this slave woman named Theresa, a present from Stavros, the merchant of Rhodes. He dares to suggest that this woman might be a fitting present from the governor to the sultan himself. Please accept this humble gift."

The official addressed the representative in Turkish. The translator said, "It is an honor to accept such a gift from such a loyal follower as Stavros, the Greek, of Rhodes. Please convey to him the governor's thanks and allow Stavros to know that the governor remains his friend in all things."

Milos beamed as he motioned Theresa forward into the trusteeship of the official.

It finally struck Theresa like a bolt of lightening that she was being given away like some ... some thing, like one of the bales, casks, and bundles the men were carrying off the



ship and down the wharf. She was no longer in control of her fate or her life, if she had ever been. Now she was in a strange land, with strangely dressed people speaking a strange language.

*Relax into it, she told herself, remembering her karate classes. It will be as it will be. Relax, observe, learn. Just like sparring. Circle, observe, learn the opponent's style before committing to any move.*

The official smiled just as broadly when Theresa smiled at him and bowed demurely.

"Do you speak Turkish?" asked the official.

"Only a few words."

"Don't worry, it's easy to learn," the official reassured her. "Most people learn it when they're children."

Milos was supervising his men as they prepared to unload the ship. The nanny came down the gangway, herding her toddlers to another official who was waiting for them.

"Greek," the official with Theresa barked to the representative who had first met Milos, "Come with me and translate."

"Yes, effendi."

The translator spoke as the trio walked through the crowded streets, "He says you are not to be concerned for your safety. You are under the protection of the governor, who is, himself, a representative of the sultan. No one dares lift a hand to you. He says we are going to the governor's palace. He says there you will bathe and change clothes, and there will be a tutor to teach you our language. You will learn quickly. You will do nothing but learn our language. When you

have learned it sufficiently, the governor will decide what to do with you. He wants to know if you understand."

Theresa noticed there were no women on the streets.

"I understand," she said in Turkish. One of the handful of expressions Penelope had taught her. "I understand the meaning if not the language," she added in Greek for the translator. Both men smiled at her.

From the towers of the mosques came the singsong call to prayer as the trio arrived at a gate in a tall stone wall. A uniformed soldier opened the gate and showed the three into the inner compound. The official conferred with another soldier who disappeared into the warren of tall ornate wooden buildings. He returned with a dark-haired man who was portly and pale.

The official spoke to the translator, who in turn, explained to Theresa, "This is the head eunuch of the governor's harem. He will take you to the harem, where you will meet your tutor. Don't worry, you are safe here."

Again, Theresa had to remind herself to relax and let herself be handed over to this smiling fat man.

He led her through a labyrinth of courtyards and hallways, then into a cavernous hall with what looked to Theresa like a swimming pool in the center. He motioned to her to sit on a bench, then disappeared. In a few minutes a dark haired woman whom Theresa guessed was about her own mother's age, entered.

"Hello," she said, "I'm Akasma."

"You speak Greek!"

"Yes, I am also a slave of the governor. I belong to his harem, and hold the office of mistress of languages. I will be your tutor."

"Where are all the other harem girls?"

"Harem girls? The women slaves like me all live here in the harem. The eunuchs see to our needs."

"Who are the eunuchs?"

"I'll explain, but let's bathe first. You've had a long trip."

Less self conscious after the almost constant nudity and semi nudity on Rhodes, Theresa lifted her chiton over her head. She noticed the appreciative look from Akasma.

"Yes, you will be a fine present for the sultan. I am sure the governor will be pleased. And so will the sultan."

"What makes me so special?"

Akasma had removed her frock-like coat and stepped out of her baggy trousers. Theresa noticed that her whole body was clean-shaven. Theresa was now self-conscious about the hair sprouting in her armpits. Akasma slid into the water and began rubbing herself with scented oil from a stone container on the edge of the pool.

"Don't worry, child. I was a Greek myself. When I was thirteen I showed a certain talent for languages. My father could no longer support another mouth, he sold me into slavery. I have served food, cooked, washed clothes ... almost every servant's job in the harem. I'm not beautiful as you are, so I wasn't destined to be an odalisque, but when the governor learned that I knew Turkish, Greek, and Arabic, he made me his mistress of languages. Then, from other slaves here, I learned Armenian, Circassian, Polish, and

Russian. From learning languages, I learned how to teach them. I teach the governor's children reading and writing ... in Arabic. Here, wash with some of this." Akasma indicated the stone bowl full of oil.

Theresa was surprised to find that it made some suds as she washed herself.

"Now your hair. What's special about you? You have a remarkable set of features that the sultans and high officials always appreciate. Your breasts are large and firm, your waist is thin, and your hips ... For these men, the most erotic part of a woman is her thighs and hips. Your hips are what they call 'pillow hips.'"

"Meaning I'm..." since she still didn't know the word for "fat ass," she said, "Meaning I have large hips?"

"Not large. Shapely. Look," Akasma said as she lifted herself onto the tile floor that surrounded the pool. "My hips are nothing. My breasts are small. Nothing. I am lucky to be in the harem here because there's nothing about my form or face that makes me beautiful.

"Here, all of us get food every day. We have shelter and protection. The women who live like my mother have to work hard every day in the fields, in the houses. They have no hips, not even hips as poor as these." She ran her hands down her own hips. "When they're fifteen or sixteen, their fathers give them to other men for wives and they begin to have children and have one a year 'til they're my age. Then they die. Half their kids die because they get sick, or they can't feed them. So yes, you are remarkably beautiful. And in this land, people find blond hair and blue eyes especially

attractive. Here," Akasma held out a large towel for Theresa to step into.

"Your body is all hairy. The women here don't find that clean. I've been here so long, I see the point. We'll have one of the eunuchs take care of that for you."

"When do I start learning Turkish?"

"After you get dried off, dressed, fed, and presented to the governor. Right now, come with me to the apartments."

Akasma led Theresa through another courtyard to a maze of large bedrooms. "This will be your room while you are with us," Akasma motioned to an empty room. Here are the hot baths. She showed her through another courtyard to a vaulted room full of steam. Several naked women sat on the edges of the pool and several others were in it. They were engaged in a lively conversation.

"Akasma! Akasma!" they shouted in unison, then something Theresa couldn't understand.

"They want to see you. Come in, let me introduce you to them. Right now we need to get you fed and dressed, so we'll introduce them later. Don't worry. They're all friendly. It's not like the sultan's harem. None of their sons are going to be sultans. You're not a threat. But they may be a bit standoffish. You're not staying with us, so they may think there's no reason to invest any effort in getting to know you—unless they want some connection in the sultan's harem at some time in the future. Most of these women aren't like that. They are content to be here."

Akasma took Theresa by the hand to lead her into the bathing hall. To Theresa she said, "I'm going to unwrap you

so they can all see you. Don't be shy. Don't be afraid. Everyone here is a woman."

Akasma gently pulled Theresa's towel from her.

The women in and around the pool all stared at Theresa with frank and silent appreciation before they started chattering to Akasma.

Akasma turned to Theresa and said, "They think you'll go far in Istanbul. They want to know if you dance, if you play the lute, if you sing, if you are schooled in the erotic arts, if you are a story teller and if you've had supper yet."

"Tell them, 'no.'"

Akasma looked puzzled.

Theresa said, "No. The answer to all of their questions is 'no.'"

Theresa translated. There was more chatter.

"They say never mind. There's a dance instructor and music teachers to help you."

"Who are they anyway."

"Those four at the far end of the hot bath? They're the governor's wives. These three sitting with their feet in the water, they're concubines. That's the mistress of the wardrobe; that's the slave in charge of the kitchen; that one is in charge of provisions, telling the eunuchs what to procure for the palace. That one," she continued, pointing out individual women, "Is the keeper of the palace treasury, and that one is the chief accountant. Eunuchs work for them, and eunuchs are in charge of some departments. They come in the harem too. They don't bathe with us, but they can attend to us while we bathe. Come, you'll learn all this later. You

have to get dressed. Let's go back to your room where the wardrobe mistress has had some clothes laid out for you."

The two naked women walked nonchalantly through the halls and courtyards back to Theresa's bedroom. Inside was a large bed covered with a red silk coverlet. On the bed was laid a long wide sleeved robe of red silk embroidered with intricate floral designs.

"These Turks. They like floral designs, even in names. The name they gave me means 'white rose.'"

"It's not your real name?"

"It is now. My father and mother called me 'Alexis.' Here, put these on first. That's right. Now tie the waist."

Theresa stepped into the wide legged pants and fastened the sash around her waist.

"Now the coat."

"Nothing else?"

"Yes, there's a sash that goes around the middle to hold the coat shut."

"That's it?"

"We don't wear veils in the harem. Since we don't leave the harem we don't need veils. Oh, you mean the slippers. Yes, put those on too."

"Veils?"

"Oh, I forgot. This is a Moslem country. You're probably Orthodox aren't you? Eastern Orthodox like most Greeks?"

"Sure," Theresa agreed, not quite knowing what she was agreeing to.

"We're all Moslem. Not that anyone has to be. We just are. After you've been here for a while, you'll see. Let me throw on a robe and we'll get a bite to eat."

Theresa followed her teacher to another room and watched as she donned a blue silk robe and slippers.

They hadn't gone far down a long hall before Theresa smelled the appetizing aroma of cooking food.

"We're going to eat in the kitchen."

A lamb was roasting on a spit over a wood fire. On other fires boiled pots of sauces, and one was full of yellow colored rice. Akasma spoke to one of the kitchen staff and in a blink of an eye, Theresa was looking at a plate piled with seafood pilaf surrounded by pieces of broiled chicken, and a smaller dish of sliced tomatoes and cucumbers in a yogurt sauce.

"We eat with our right hands," Akasma instructed. "Eat. Everyone agrees, you are a very beautiful girl, but your weak point is your stomach. You need to put on some padding. With that, the Sultan will not be able to resist you. So eat."

Eat she did. Theresa had forgotten how hungry she was. She had to be careful not to spill the savory morsels of food on her silk clothing.

\* \* \* \*

After a week in the harem, that time on Rhodes when she ate, swam, and made love all day long and half the night with Penelope seemed like another lifetime, some kind of paradise. Here she was up every morning for her dance lessons. The mistress of dance was as demanding as any karate sensei she'd had at the Flying Yoni. "Up hip, Down hip, fingers,



fingers, fingers. Hands up. Chin up. Smile." At least now she knew the words.

Then conversation with Akasma. Every time she thought she'd learned something, Akasma went to another level where Theresa felt just as ignorant as before. The mistress of music tried her best to teach Theresa to play the lute. The lute! Theresa had never been able to pick up the guitar, much less the lute. When she wasn't at lessons, she kept getting lost in the maze of halls and courtyards. It seemed to her that her bedchamber moved every day to a different corner of the harem.

She was gaining weight, though. The plentiful and delicious meals and the rich desserts—the baklava alone would have done it—were working their magic in spite of the calories she burned trying to learn to dance. She got increasingly approving stares from the other women in the hot baths.

After all the buildup, she was presented to the governor. He looked up at her, a woman behind him whispered in his ear, and according to Akasma, he said "Prepare her for the sultan," and dismissed her with a wave of a hand as he went on to more important matters. She appreciated the hot baths and the attentions of the eunuch.

In the language lessons, Akasma tried to explain the complexities of the Ottoman system to Theresa.

"In the harem of the sultan live the eunuchs and the women. Some eunuchs serve the women of the harem, but most are the administrators of the far-flung empire. They prepare the messages, made the plans, keep the accounts, pay the merchants, collect the taxes. The Vizier is a slave

who oversees the eunuchs, and thus the government. He is raised from childhood in a powerful household so he will learn all the details of administration. It is important to have a number of qualified slaves available. If the Vizier makes a mistake, or displeases either the Sultan, the Sultan's mother, or the people of Istanbul, he is quite likely to be killed.

"The Janissaries and eunuchs are all from non-Moslem lands. A Moslem cannot enslave another of the faithful, but infidels enslave other infidels. Infidels, knowing of the needs of the Empire, castrate the eunuchs when they are children so they can serve the sultan. Since they are not men, they can enter the harem and serve the women there as well."

"Castrate?" Theresa asked, feeling that she was drowning in a sea of unfamiliar words.

"Yes. There are three kinds. Some, they cut off everything. Some they cut off the testicles and leave the penis. It's less severe. With others, they cut off the penis but not the testicles, so the man has the desires of other men, but not the means. That's a punishment. The other two forms are for making eunuchs."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"They're slaves."

Theresa was assigned a Greek eunuch as an act of compassion because Akasma refused to speak Greek with her any longer. Now that Akasma was responsible for teaching Theresa Turkish, everything was Turkish.

After she was presented to the governor and returned to her room, Theresa slept naked and dreamed of her childhood friend, and Penelope. She dreamed of doing with Angela the

things Penelope had taught her, dreamed of being with Penelope, and woke in the middle of the night wet with sexual desire. She opened her labia with her finger as she had done when Penelope had asked to see how she played with herself. She imagined Penelope watching.

*Penelope watching Theresa masturbate. Getting excited at the thought, the images she was seeing, opening her own legs, playing with herself as the other girl watched Theresa play with herself. Now kissing, now feeling Penelope's tongue massaging her clitoris. Angela's now developed breasts. Kissing her nipple, Angle kissing her lips, entwining her tongue...*

Theresa moaned and tried to sleep again. Sleep would not come. She turned onto her stomach and inserted her fingers from below and gyrated around her fingers more and more frantically as she played with her clitoris with the fingers of her other hand. The images swam before her, the sensations flooded her brain, and she swallowed a scream as she shivered in orgasm.

The next morning Demitrius woke her with a gentle shake. "Come, girl, I have instructions to clean you up."

Sleepy and puzzled, Theresa staggered to her feet and followed the broad back of the eunuch. "My name is Demitrius. We can speak Greek. Akasma said it would be all right, but after a couple of weeks, she'll tell me to make it only Turkish, so learn fast?"

"I'm trying."

Demitrius told her to lie on a long cushioned bench at the side of the hot baths. They had the room to themselves.

Demitrius took a long knife from the folds of his voluminous clothing and honed it on a leather strop attached to his belt.

"Ever hear the story of Saladan and King Richard, the crusader?"

She shook her head.

"Richard is going to prove how superior his sword is. So he grabs his two handed sword and cuts through a tree. Saladan, you know who he was, right? King of the Arabs. He takes his scimitar in one hand and a silk scarf in the other. He drops the scarf and as it falls, that motion is enough that it gets cut in half on the scimitar. Arabs like the story. Proves how subtle they are or something. But now this knife is as sharp as Saladan's scimitar. Hold your arms overhead. That's right."

He rubbed her armpits with aromatic oil and shaved them bare. Then he proceeded to shave her pubic hair and her legs.

"Now, how do I keep from being prickly all the time? When I tried this once before, back home, I just got prickly down there."

"The other women will show you. But see these? These are pumice stones."

He rubbed more oil onto the areas he'd just shaved and rubbed her down with the stone 'til her skin was tingling all over.

"Do that every day when you come to the baths."

She stretched out and felt the smoothness of her skin with her hand. "What do eunuchs do for sex?" she said, curious.

"Most of us aren't interested. Some are. Me for instance. I was already having sex with an older man when I was sold, so I liked it. I still do."

"I don't understand."

"Some of these Janissaries are young and very horny, and very well endowed, if you know what I mean."

Theresa wasn't sure she did, but she wasn't about to ask.

"Would you like to watch?"

"Watch what?"

"One of my lovers with me."

"How, without leaving the harem?"

"Look," he said, leading her to an intricately inlaid mosaic of floral motifs. "See this larger flower here? One of the black spaces isn't a tile. It's a hole. You can see through it to the courtyard."

"A peephole?"

"Yes. Next time I'm going to meet one of my lovers, I'll let you know and you can see for yourself."

"Are there other peepholes around here?"

"All over the place. The longer you stay, the more you'll learn. Whenever you see two or three people crowded around one of these designs, it's likely they're watching something through the peephole."

"Is there a word for that in Turkish?"

"For what? For secretly watching other people masturbate or having sex? Yes, I think so, but I don't know it. I just call it 'looking through a peephole.' Turks have words for everything."

"What do they mean by 'erotic arts'?"

"Oh, well ... that's ... that means ... why not ask your language teacher. She teaches that too ... I've heard, that is ... I think..."

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"Peepholes?"

The eunuch nodded as three of the governor's concubines came into the bath hall. "If you need anything, just call on me. Demetrius."

Theresa smiled at him and slipped into the hot water with the three other women. They were busily oiling themselves and rubbing their bodies with pumice stones as Demetrius had shown her.

## CHAPTER 5

Time passed swiftly in conversation with Akasma. The feeling of a trap springing to catch her, the feeling her mother had so long inculcated in her, diminished as her skill with the language increased daily. Then suddenly, there were no more traps, just interesting features of the language.

"You're learning fast," Akasma said after a month passed.

The servants brought out supper on a large platter that contained a pile of saffron colored kous kous with shrimp and mussels in the center and pieces of lamb around the edges. There was the usual cucumber and tomato salad and scented water to drink.

The eunuch waiter leaned down to whisper to Theresa, "Demitrius told me to tell you the flowers will look especially good in the light of tonight's full moon."

"There are no secrets with these acoustics are there?" Akasma said with a smile. "What did that mean?"

Theresa said it again in Greek.

"That's not what I meant. I meant that was something like a code. What did it mean?"

"I don't suppose Demetrius would mind. He's going to meet a janissary that's a friend of his. In the courtyard behind the hall of the hot baths."

"Oh that, of course. No, he won't mind a bit. Don't worry."

The two sat naked in the hot bath to continue their language practice, with questions and answers about the details of the sultan's harem and the administrative system of

the empire. Theresa was having a hard time keeping straight, the titles for all of the offices, but had a pretty good idea of the rest.

Absorbed in the discussion, Theresa lost all track of time until Akasma pointed out that moonlight was coming through the door to the courtyard. Theresa lifted herself out of the steaming water, wrapped herself in a towel, and went to the mosaic of the flower where Demitrius had shown her the peephole. As she looked, she gasped in amazement.

"What are they doing?"

Akasma was standing behind her, naked.

"May I see?"

Theresa stepped aside. "Oh, I see" Akasma whispered. "Yes, come look again." Akasma went to the bowls of scented oil by the bathing pool.

When Theresa looked through the peephole again, Akasma tugged the towel away from Theresa's body and let it fall to the floor. Then, standing directly behind Theresa she said, "I'll show you what they're doing." Gently Akasma moved a finger between Theresa's firm buttocks until she located her anus. Then, with her oiled finger, she circled it as Theresa squirmed. Finally, Akasma slowly moved her fingertip inside the tight opening. Theresa gasped, but Akasma couldn't tell whether it was pain or pleasure at what she was doing, or because of something Theresa was seeing in the courtyard. Akasma continued to slowly insert her finger, exploring Theresa's anus. When her finger was all the way in, Akasma waited for a moment to gauge Theresa's reaction. When



Theresa rotated her butt around her finger, Akasma continued to gently insert and withdraw her finger.

Theresa turned and whispered to Akasma, "That Janissary is using something much larger than your finger, Akasma. Did you see the size of that..."

Akasma looked again. This time, Theresa stood close behind her but reached around her hips with both hands to stroke down her smooth pubis and open her labia. Theresa drew the moisture up from Akasma's cunt and began stroking her clitoris. Akasma's clitoris responded as Theresa circled firmly, then began lightly fluttering her fingertip on the end of the hardened clitoris.

Akasma gasped and fell backward into Theresa's arms.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Akasma asked.

"My teacher was a Greek. She'd been to one of the Sappho schools for women."

"Oh, lucky girl," Akasma answered. "Look again. Do you know what Demetrius is doing now?"

Theresa looked. "He's just standing there," she whispered. "The Janissary is just standing behind him, very close. They're not doing anything."

"Keep watching."

Finally the Janissary fell with a moan that they could hear inside the bath chamber.

"What was he doing?"

"They're done for now. Come over to the pool. Put your finger in the oil. Now do to me what I was doing to you."

Theresa stood behind Akasma and slid her oiled finger into her anus. She felt Akasma's anus relax, open, welcoming her

finger. It felt as though Akasma was drawing Theresa's finger into her, pulling it quite strongly. Akasma's anus pulsed around Theresa's finger as the sensation of being pulled in grew stronger.

"That's what Demitrius was doing to the soldier?"

"Yes."

"How did you learn to do that?"

"Like you, I had a teacher, but a different kind. That's what the soldier felt on his penis. Men like that. It makes them ejaculate."

Theresa had to try to remember the details of her sex education classes. Her understanding of sexual parts and practices involving males was vague.

"Demitrius said you could teach me things like that. He called them 'erotic arts.'"

"I was hoping you would ask to learn. I know the governor approves because he intends you as a gift for the Sultan. But the erotic ... Eros was the god of love. Love is so much ... It's in the heart and the mind."

"Doesn't it have to do with sex?"

"Some of it. This is one of these things I can't explain. Every person has to learn it for herself. The sex part ... that I can explain and teach you. I don't know if you've noticed, but the governor has four wives and several concubines. Sometimes three, sometimes four or five. Any of them is much more beautiful than I could ever hope to be, but when he wants to be satisfied, he invites me to his bed."

"Aren't the others jealous?"

"Sometimes, but not so much. I can't have children. The main thing they would be worried about is some sort of claim from a son. Who he fucks isn't especially important. So as I was saying, there's some connection between love and sex, but it's not much. You want to be able to use the sex to get the rest of him involved. That's about all it can do."

The two sat on the edge of the pool with their feet in the hot water.

"But to be a favorite of the Sultan, you have to know more than erotic arts. It's good to please him that way, but if that's all you can do, he'll be finished with you in one night. No matter how beautiful you are, others are more beautiful, and beauty fades."

Appreciating the glow of Theresa's youthful beauty, thinking she'd always been too slight to be beautiful, even when she was young, Akasma smiled at her student.

"What other ways?" Theresa asked.

"Your mind, girl. We need to start practicing with things besides administration, like knowing the difference between wisdom and stupidity."

"How do you know that?"

"By listening to great teachers. You need to learn to read Arabic so you can read their writings. But I will tell what little I know, for instance of Nasrudin Hodja."

"Nasrudin Hodja?"

"Yes. An ancient wise man. He set up a market stall with a sign that said he would answer two questions on any subject for only one hundred coins of silver. A rich man saw the sign. He needed to know if his caravan from China would arrive

safely and when it would arrive. He gave Nasrudin the money and said, 'a hundred coins is pretty expensive for two questions isn't it?' Nasrudin said, 'Yes, what's your second question?'"

Theresa laughed. "You're saying I ask too many questions?"

"No, but perhaps I have not provided enough answers. You need to know how to distract the Sultan's mind from the cares of state and also show him things he might not see, so he can take refreshment in other things."

"How do you do that?"

"By telling stories. Have you heard of Sheherizade?"

"Yes, even in the north we've heard of her. But I don't know her stories."

Both women stared into the water. Finally Akasma broke the silence.

"Have you ever been with a man?"

"Sort of, I mean..."

"Has a man ever fucked you?"

"You mean put his penis in my vagina? No. Only a little with his finger."

"You see the problem. Sometimes these high officials like virgins. But virgins have no idea how to please a man, so I will teach you. Then you can be a virgin who knows every way there is to please a man."

"And a woman?"

"I think you already know something about that."

"But I'm sure there's more to learn," Theresa answered.

"I expect you are right. but right now, let us spend the night together in your room."

\* \* \* \*

After breakfast and their hot baths, Akasma procured a long cylindrical squash from the kitchen and motioned for Theresa to rejoin her in Theresa's room.

"Is that a kind of cucumber?" Theresa asked.

"No, a kind of squash, but the important thing is that it's about the right size and shape for what we need to practice with. The first time can hurt a little bit, but don't let that worry you. It's much better to do it this way than with a man."

"Don't they notice?"

"Who knows? We're going to train your muscles so you can be as tight or as open as you want to be. If he wants you tight, then you can give him that. This is something you should do at your own pace. It's probably best on your back ... that's right ... like that. Oh you know what to do with it already. Good."

"I don't know. I think it feels good," Theresa said.

"Put it all the way in."

"Oh. Oh, I see what you mean, but it's still good."

"Good, you go on and practice with that for a while. You can play with your clitoris too if you like. I like to do that. You're getting it. Good."

When Aksama returned Theresa had learned to pleasure herself with the squash and had moved on to trying it in her anus.

"You may need some help with that, and you don't want to put something that's been in your anus into your vagina. You'll get infected. Not even the Sultan's cock. Even if he wants to, wash it before. He'll like that anyway. Here, I'll get another. That's ok, you can keep doing what you were doing, just don't put it in your vagina."

Aksama returned with another squash.

"Now," Aksama instructed, "put it just a little way inside your cunt. That's right. Now pull it the rest of the way in. No, don't push it with your hand, pull it by tightening your anus and squeezing your butt together and tightening everything you have down there."

"It's not going in."

"Not at first. You have to develop some control. It's like the dance. At first you couldn't even move your hips or belly and now you've nearly mastered it."

"That's not coming any more easily than Turkish."

"You're doing fine in both. Practice contracting like that for a while. It'll take a couple of weeks. When you're ready, we'll move on to anal contractions like I showed you last night."

"Could I spend the night with you again? At your room?"

"I'd like that, if you're not too sore. You had a good teacher and you are such a delicious lover."

\* \* \* \*

In the days that followed Theresa became skilled at drawing the squash into her by whatever route, grew more fluent in Turkish, learned of the lore of Nasrudin and Sheherizade, and mastered more moves and combinations of

moves of the dance. Her dance teacher moved on to the zils, brass finger cymbals and the mysteries of veils. Theresa and Akasma were frequent lovers. Theresa liked the older woman's slow touch, her definiteness, the weightlessness of her stroke. She also appreciated Akasma's responses to her lovemaking.

The wives, concubines and functionaries largely ignored Theresa. Akasma explained that the women of the harem didn't see her as a permanent addition. They didn't need to invest anything in someone who was going away soon. They were sociable enough in the baths, admired her developing skills with the language, lute, and dance, but didn't seem that friendly.

\* \* \* \*

"Let's go over how you will make love with the Sultan the first time." Akasma said.

"I come into his chamber. If he's dressed I dance for him until he says he wants me. If that doesn't work, I tell him stories until he says he's ready."

"Oh the dance will work. The other day when you did the solo for the governor? He kept four wives and two concubines busy before he called for me. You got him aroused."

"Do you think I can please the sultan the way you please the governor?"

"I don't even dance. Of course you can."

"So when he's finally naked and on his back, I take his penis in my hand. If it's stone hard, then I straddle him and guide him into my cunt. If he's not stone hard, then I do what

you taught me with my mouth, tongue and hand until he is stone hard. Once he's inside me, that's when I start to pulse my vaginal muscles and do the hip movements from the dance. He should ejaculate quickly. Then I revive him with my mouth and hand."

"What if he has something else in mind."

"Then we do that."

"Your dance teacher was satisfied with your performance. The wives, concubines and I thank you for that too. You are good. Where do you get the endurance to maintain a shimmy all that long, over your whole body? Your Turkish is adequate to tell stories and discuss government policy and philosophy, so you can talk about something more than boats and fish, or goats and milk. You can barely read and can't write very well, but you can work on those skills in Istanbul. You have a couple of good verses from Sappho, but by and large your poetry isn't very good. Tell stories instead. I think you've gained control of muscles you didn't even know you had. We would need a man to tell us just how good you are, but that's going to be for the Sultan to know and nobody else—no other man anyway. You're prepared to give him anything he wants?"

"Yes. Unless there's some other way of making love you haven't shown me."

"Not that I know of. Not with your body. The rest is with your mind. That's the major part. The erotic moves are to get his attention, but I told you, that will not last even one night without the rest."



"I hope I can manage that. It's the sexual part I'm not sure about. That's why I keep asking. I'm supposed to satisfy him, but what if he doesn't satisfy me?"

"First of all, you are a slave, it doesn't matter. Second, you are a slave in the harem of the most beautiful women in the world—and the most skilled in every way. You will be well satisfied. You don't need a man for that. If you don't find satisfaction with the other women of the harem, there are the eunuchs."

"I thought you said they were ... not all ... not all there..."

"That's one way to say it. They can't please you like a man can, but you saw how sensuous Demetrius is. Let me tell you, he also knows how to please women. He has very well trained fingers and a tongue that knows its way about a woman's body."

"You sound like you know..."

"I do. That's why I knew he wouldn't mind if I joined you the other night at the peephole. But you have to ask him. It's not his place to ask you. That's the way it works. Higher people get things from lower ones, but no matter how low you are, there's always someone lower."

"Doesn't it bother you? Being a slave, I mean?"

"What? Why should it? Look at the alternative. Girls can stay with their families. Their fathers beat and abuse them. Then the fathers give them away to a husband who beats and abuses them. That's worse than slavery. They don't even own you, so they don't have to take care of you. Believe me, being a slave is a lot better than that life, especially in the

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governor's house. And the Sultan's harem? That must be a vision of heaven."

"The Sultan. What if he wants someone else? I don't mean instead of me. I can get used to that. But I mean with me, at the same time?"

"I've explained how to manage with two or three women. The main thing is to enjoy the women. If you have anything to say about it, and you may not, don't do it unless it's with women you like and trust."

"Maybe you'll join us some time?"

"I'm just a provincial governor's slave."

## CHAPTER 6

Demitrius explained to Theresa that the Governor had ordered him to accompany her and stay with her in the Sultan's harem. Both of them would be gifts from the Governor. First they would meet with a caravan coming from China on the Silk Road, and would stay with the caravan to the end of the road at Bursa. When the caravan disbanded, a group of Janissaries and Demitrius would accompany Theresa to Bursa's port at the village of Yalova, and go almost directly to the imperial palace by boat across the Sea of Marmara.

"You must wear this," Demitrius cautioned, "from the time we leave the harem until the time you are received into the sultan's harem."

He held up a black tent-like garment with a mesh peek hole to see out of.

"No."

"What do you mean, 'no'? You're a slave and you'll do as you're told."

"What I mean, is *no*. Help me out here, friend Demitrius. You know I love you and you know you love me. You've watched Akasma and me making love just as we've watched you and your Janissary friends. We're that close. So do me a favor; allow me to dress as a Janissary. At least allow me to dress as a boy with the caravan."

"It's going to be hard to conceal all of this." He looked admiringly at her full breasts, thighs and hips, and her now

shapely belly. "Just how do you propose to conceal such a womanly form as this?" He indicated her voluptuous body.

*I don't feel grotesque*, Theresa realized, the thought striking her like a bolt of lightening. *How can I feel grotesque when everyone admires me so much?* "Bring me some of your clothes. I'll go as a eunuch." She indicated his baggy trousers and voluminous shirt and jacket. "No telling what's under all of that, is there?"

"You have no beard."

"Neither do you, or any eunuchs. I'll go as a eunuch."

"Why are you insisting on this?"

"Why are the Janissaries coming? Just to keep you company at night?"

"It could be dangerous."

"How dangerous? We're in the middle of the Empire that has destroyed the pirates who preyed on merchant shipping, the Empire that has built the roads and created the messenger system so the Vizier can know immediately what is happening in all corners of the world. What danger could there be?"

"There are still bandits."

"Bandits? Where do the bandits come from?"

"You've been in the harem too long, my lady. Most of the women here, and most of us eunuchs, and I ... we are from very poor families. Our families could not guess from one day to the next what they would eat. Our fathers sold us so they wouldn't have to feed us any longer. Sold us for the price of a few days more of food for the rest. We've had better lives, yes. But out there, beyond the beauties of the harem, out

there are poor people. Sometimes they band together. Sometimes they turn to banditry."

"So that's why the Janissaries have to come with us? Fear of bandits?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Well, let's do this. You can pack all of my girl stuff in the trunks. Bring me one set of Eunuch clothes. I'll wear those and stay with you. If something happens, I want to be able to move. I will not be hobbled like some worthless piece of baggage in a tent."

"Yes, my lady."

The Greek slave girl who had arrived with nothing but a light cotton garment to cover her nudity left with two trunks full of embroidered silk clothes, lavish cotton towels, and sheer costumes for the dance. Theresa spent the last night with Akasma.

"You've been a good teacher. Thank you. I am in your debt."

"You repay the debt to your teacher by teaching another who needs it as much as you did. But you've been a good student. I will always welcome you to my bed."

The eunuchs carried the trunks out under the direction of Demetrius. Theresa walked out with the eunuch, dressed as another eunuch, to join the caravan.

They rode horses to the caravansary outside of the city walls where the caravan waited for the dawn. Theresa saw camels wearing the most colorful fringe and tassels she'd ever seen, as though they were some sort of four legged dancers in costume for a performance.

"Stay with the horses," Demitrius cautioned her. "Stay with the governor's party."

The camels clambered to their feet as their drivers loaded them and goaded them into action. Some protested with loud bellows, others spat and stared menacingly at the people who made them work. Theresa stopped counting after a hundred and fifty.

The sun slowly cleared the horizon as the caravan stretched out along the road connecting Europe with China. The camels' bells clanked with their somehow graceful, but ungainly gait. Soon it was hot and Theresa was glad she was not wearing the women's garb Demitrius had tried to give her.

She rode with the governor's detachment; one camel with the baggage, Demitrius astride a white horse, her own horse, and two other mounted eunuchs. The other eunuchs walked, and the two dozen Janissaries walked in an orderly formation behind them. The caravan spread out as the day progressed. When the governor's group stopped to eat a lunch of flatbread, cheese, roasted meat, vegetables and fruit that the kitchen staff had packed for them, they could see only the dust of the camels following behind. They ate and left before the camels caught up.

"What's that cloud of dust?" Theresa asked Demitrius.

"Wind storm. Bandits. Who knows?"

"Are you trying to scare me?"

"No, I don't know. Wait ... I think I see horses ... yes ... bandits. Janissaries!" he shouted. "Prepare for defense."

The officer of the foot soldiers formed them into a square around the eunuchs and animals.

Closer and closer came the cloud of dust until Theresa could make out the individual horses.

They came fast and straight. Their scimitars were raised, their bows were already firing arrows.

A Janissary in front of Theresa fell with an arrow in his chest. The horsemen thundered toward the wall of Janissaries. The Janissaries used their pikes and swords to little avail. More fell to the swords. The horsemen swept past the governor's contingent and turned around to approach from the rear.

Theresa said, "Enough of this shit," but since she said it in English, nobody understood it.

She ran between the Janissaries toward the horsemen. A roundhouse kick to a horse's throat and he was down. She leapt to the fallen bandit and kicked his head decisively, twirled around to grasp the bow from the hands of an archer and wrested him to the ground, where she stove in his ribs with another kick. She pivoted and kicked the next horse in the knee to bring it's rider to the ground where she knelt over him and punched his face with her fist.

She felt nothing but the rush of adrenalin, the cold calculating computation of distance, speed and force behind a kick, a punch, a turn. As in the katas from olden times, enemies swarmed around her from all sides and as in those days of old, she dispatched them one by one until she looked up to see the Janissaries dispatching the remaining bandits.

Her body quivered, every muscle taut, her eyes and ears tuned to every motion and sound, waiting, ready to strike again.

Demitrius led two horses toward her. "Not bad for a girl. Shall we ride on?"

Theresa smiled at him and mounted her horse. "That was fun," she said. "Let's find some more bandits."

"Let's just get to Bursa, if we can," Demitrius said. "Look at these bandits. Look at them well. These are people no different from your own father."

*If only you knew. My father may be a bandit, but one who robs with a fountain pen, not with a sword.*

"So, now are you glad you didn't make me wear a tent like a woman?"

"I'm not sure. You are one strange girl."

"Well, remember, I'm from the north."

\* \* \* \*

The governor's party was one of the first into the caravanserai outside Bursa. As the camels came lumbering, in their drivers removed their loads and took them to feed and water. The governor's party was privileged to eat and sleep inside. As the animals and people were settling in for the night another caravan, just out of Istanbul, began to trickle into the compound.

Theresa sat with the two other eunuchs as they ate their steaming lamb stew and flatbread with the Janissaries.

"Where's Demitrius?" Theresa asked the captain of the guard.



The captain looked down at his food. "Probably looking for some of his friends from Istanbul."

"Oh, other eunuchs?"

"That could be. More likely some of his Janissary friends."

"Oh," Theresa replied.

"You know Demitrius."

"Yes."

The meal finished, she sat with the eunuchs and listened to the stories the Janissaries told of other caravans, other encounters with bandits, wondering why the governor had told them to stay in Istanbul when they arrived there.

"We're always the last to know what is going on," the Captain summarized. "And you," he said to Theresa, "I never saw a eunuch fight like that. They usually don't use anything more lethal than a pen."

"If they do, it would be poison," a Janissary added.

"It's something a Chinese monk taught me when I was young."

"Oh, I've heard of them, but I've never seen what they do. I've heard stories of monks from Shao Lin, I think it was, fighting like that. Could you teach us?"

"It takes a long time."

"We will have time in Istanbul."

"But my time will not be my own there. The Vizier will have work for me."

"Ah, work with your pen?"

"Yes."

The Janissaries wrapped themselves in their blankets and Theresa lay with the two eunuchs, wrapped in hers.

Exhausted from rising early, the trip, and the encounter with the bandits, she fell into a deep sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Theresa was instantly awake at the nudge of her blanket. His finger to his lip, Demetrius motioned her to follow him through the courtyard and outside the walls.

"Too many ears in there," the eunuch explained.

"What's going on."

"I'm not sure, but I want you to know before we get to Istanbul. We will go immediately to the harem there, and there will be no privacy, and there won't be any between here and there."

"What is it?"

"News from some of my Janissary friends."

"Oh, so you were with them."

"Yes, and they tell their lovers things. These Janissaries are on the way from Istanbul to Izmir to replace the ones the governor is sending to the Sultan."

"Why not just leave them where they are?"

"If they stay too long in one place they may become loyal to someone like the governor, not to the sultan. But my friends from Istanbul told me there's likely to be more than the usual danger in the harem."

"Usual danger?"

"Not for you, necessarily, but women from the harem are all trying to catch the Sultan's eye, become one of his favorites, bear his son so they can be the mother of the next sultan, the most powerful person in the Empire."

*Penelope never mentioned danger, she thought.*

"The basis of the empire is that the Sultan, and only the Sultan, rules. We eunuchs do all of the work of the empire; the Janissaries are the army. We are all slaves. So are all the women of the harem, like you. Do you understand?"

Theresa nodded as they walked slowly down the road toward Bursa.

"The Sultan never marries. So the most powerful woman is his mother. Because his father, the previous Sultan, had many sons, the first thing any new Sultan must do is eliminate any possible threat from his many half-brothers and their mothers. He usually has them all killed immediately."

Theresa gasped. "That's a bit bloody, isn't it?"

"Janissaries die for the Empire. Some boys who are meant to be eunuchs die in the process. So, yes, it may be a bit bloody, but not as bloody as a fight between two, three, or more half brothers with their supporters. That would divide the empire into different parts, and the whole would collapse."

Theresa nodded doubtfully.

"You see, the problem is we have a new Sultan. He's only twenty-two. His mother is a very strong woman. She had to be, for him to be named Sultan. She was the last favorite of the old Sultan, but not the only one. The previous favorite is the sister of the head of the guild of merchants in Istanbul. She was furious when the sultan named a new favorite; more furious, that her son was not made sultan. A woman scorned. The news of the new Sultan reached her before the Janissaries came to take her son. Both of them fled to her

brother, who, the Janissaries tell me, is hiding them somewhere."

"Now I don't understand. Why would he do that?"

"He's protecting his nephew. Anyone would do the same thing."

"How did the news get out?"

"Ah, there's the problem. One of the Janissary captains of Istanbul was raised in the uncle's house. It appears his loyalty to him is greater than his loyalty to the new sultan."

"Why doesn't the sultan just have him killed?"

"The sultan doesn't know any of this."

For the second time, Theresa felt stunned as the implications sank in. Suddenly she felt the chill of the night as she looked at the scimitar sharp crescent moon and the brightly twinkling stars.

"So, you think this Janissary captain is planning to do something?"

"I'm not sure. This is just the talk from the Janissaries."

"But it's dangerous because he could be planning something? Something against the Sultan to put his ... what would he be ... the former favorite's son in as Sultan? Why would he do that?"

"Because then the sultan would be of the same house as the head of the Istanbul guild of merchants. A strong alliance. One brother head of the guild, one sister, the mother of the Sultan. The Sultan's uncle a powerful and wealthy merchant, the merchant's nephew, the Sultan. Most of the power of the empire in one house."

"Oh..." Theresa stopped in her tracks and faced Demitrius.  
"Oh, so..."

"Yes, then they would bypass the eunuchs and we..."

"Would lose your influence and power."

"Yes. So you see the danger?"

"To the sultan, yes."

"To the eunuchs, the Empire, to the basic fabric of our system. Once that happens there's nothing to hold the Empire together. The sultan becomes a puppet and he marries someone his uncle and mother select for him. They become the family of the next sultan. But they are beholden to the merchant family. An aristocracy starts and in two or three generations..."

"How do I fit in?"

"Now," the eunuch said, "That is for you to figure out. But to figure it out, you have to know these things."

"You'll be with me in the harem?"

"Yes, but ... remember the peepholes in the governor's harem?"

A faint line of pink was showing on the horizon.

"We must return. The caravan will be leaving soon,"  
Demitrius took Theresa by the elbow to lead her back to the gate.

## CHAPTER 7

Demitrius was as awed as Theresa at the opulence of Topkapi Palace. When the caravan broke up at Bursa, the governor's party went on to Yalova where they got on a royal barge that took them to the foot of the palace. Demitrius walked beside the four carriers who lifted the curtained sedan chair concealing Theresa. Donkeys carried the chests the governor had sent with her. Eunuchs greeted them, took them to the baths and showed them their quarters. The head eunuch said he would present the two to the sultan the next day.

Theresa was glad of the hot bath because she was beginning to itch from the dust of the road and the hair sprouting all over her body. As she lowered herself into the steaming pool, one of the women sitting on a cushion beside it said, "You must be the new girl."

"Yes," Theresa admitted, rubbing her legs with a pumice stone. Her pores opened and the dust of the road melted away in the hot water.

Two of the other women joined her in the pool.

"I'm Gordana," a dark haired woman about Theresa's age said with a broad smile. "I haven't been here that long, either. Where are you from?"

"I'm from..." *Chicago won't work; America won't work; Rhodes?; Izmir?* "I'm from Izmir," Theresa answered.

"I'm Dusana," the other young woman said. "From Dubrovnik"

"I'm from Serbia," Gordana added.

*These women are so beautiful. They are both nicely slim with small firm breasts. What am I doing here?*

A woman Theresa judged to be about her mother's age, came into the hall with her arm around a younger woman with long wavy dark hair and green eyes. Both women had full thighs and rounded hips and stomachs.

*At least some of these women are as fat as I am.*

"That's the sultana," Gordana whispered.

"And Elma," Dusana added.

The two continued on their way without acknowledging the three women in the hot pool.

"Where are they going?" Theresa asked.

The two other women smirked.

"Let's just say that Elma is the Sultana's favorite. She wishes she were the Sultan's."

"Sultana? The wife of the Sultan?" Theresa was puzzled.

"Mother," the other two said in unison.

"She sees to it that Elma is in her son's bed every night." Dusana explained.

"He doesn't sleep with you? Or..."

The other two laughed. "We're just odalisques. He can have us whenever he calls for us, but the Sultana isn't going to let that happen."

"Why?" Theresa asked as she scrubbed her hair.

"The Sultan is her son. Elma was a present from her brother, his daughter. So if he has a son with her..."

"The Sultana and her family become that much more powerful..."

"Oh," Theresa said. "But, then, aren't they cousins?"

"Yes," Dusana said, "That's the way Turks like to marry. It keeps things in the family."

Finished with their bathing, the three women climbed out of the pool and into their large towels.

Gordana and Dusana came to Theresa's apartment to accompany her to supper in the dining hall. *This is enough to feed a village for a week.* About ten groups of a dozen women sat on cushions around low tables that were piled high with saffron colored pilafs, brimming with shrimp, fish, and mussels, surrounded with morsels of grilled chicken, lamb and beef, and bowls of salad.

Hovering around each table were three eunuchs. Two took empty dishes to the kitchen and returned with steaming full ones. The third kept each glass full of cold water. When the eating stopped, the servants cleared the tables and filled them again with sliced watermelon, white-fleshed melons, figs, cherries, apricots, peaches, pears, and grapes. In the center of this opulence were dishes piled high with baklava and other sweets Theresa could not identify.

After the tables were full of fruit and desserts, the waiters brought small glasses of steaming thick coffee and tea. Theresa picked up a piece of the sticky baklava and bit into it gingerly. The honey smooth sensation permeated her mouth as she enjoyed the satisfying crunch of walnuts and tasted their bitter flavor mix with the sweetness. She barely noticed the clap of the sultana's hands at the other end of the hall that brought the instruments and musicians into the hall.



The throbbing rhythm of hands on the tight skin head of a cylindrical drum quieted the chattering in the hall as the other instruments picked up the melody and harmonies. Elma rose from her position next to the Sultana and sensuously walked to the open space in front of the musicians where she unbuttoned the long blue brocade jacket and let it fall to her feet. She wore a tasseled vest and sheer pants that gathered at her ankles. Graciously, she raised her hands to shoulder height and began to undulate in the movement Theresa knew as snake arms.

The drum beat quickened as the undulations moved down Elma's torso, first her breasts, then her stomach, hips, thighs, then, the toes of one bare foot pointing downward, she began to move across the floor. Faster and faster came the throbbing of the drum until Elma ceased her motion across the floor as waves of motion overtook her whole body in a move that Theresa had practiced for weeks but only really felt when she was experiencing an orgasm. The convulsive paroxysm ended in a bow over her extended left knee that left Elma's long dark hair spread on the floor.

Theresa only noticed the man in the harem when he began softly clapping. Not until he motioned did Elma stand erect and walk to join him through the applause of her appreciative harem mates.

"The Sultan," Gordana whispered.

"I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow," Theresa said.

"You don't meet the Sultan," Dusana corrected. "You will be presented to him. If it goes like it did when I was presented to him, he won't even notice you."

"What should I wear," Theresa looked around the room for hints.

"Something like Elma was wearing. Do you have silk brocades?" Gordana asked.

"Yes, the governor sent me with many fine clothes."

"governor? Oh..." Dulsana said, exchanging a meaningful look first with Theresa and then with Gordana.

"I guess I'm his slave until I am presented to the Sultan."

"You were the Sultan's from the time you entered the harem," Gordana said.

"That must be why she rated the royal barge and sedan chair," Dusana guessed.

"My uncle sold me to a slave dealer after my father died. My mother was already dead, and he needed to raise enough to feed the other kids. There were two other slave dealers, then I was on the market here and someone from the palace bought me. I can't imagine why, though. The Sultan never calls *me* to his bed."

"We're both too skinny," observed Gordana. "But you ... he'll notice you," she said looking at Theresa.

Suddenly Theresa felt self-conscious about taking another piece of baklava.

\* \* \* \*

*They were right. He didn't even notice. He just had one of his other slaves accept me and one of the eunuch-clerks write my name on a list. Handsome man, though. It wouldn't be any trouble to ...* At that point, her thoughts became more visual than verbal and she felt the quiver of anticipation

spreading up her thighs as it did when she knew Penelope or Akasma would be with her soon.

Demitrius stayed with her until they reached her apartment. "It was the wish of Akasma and the governor that I teach you to read, write, and what the Arabs call algebra, computing with numbers."

"What's the use? I can belly dance. I know a little about the 'erotic arts.' Why do I need to know how to read and do numbers?"

"It is not for me to say, my lady."

He took a book from a pocket of his billowing clothes and opened it in front of Theresa.

With his teaching, the parade of worms squirming from right to left across the pages became sounds, then meanings, and finally concepts in her mind. When Demitrius was not tutoring her, she bathed and talked with the new friends among the odalisques to whom Gordana and Dusana introduced her. None of them had approached her to be a lover and she was shy to approach any of them, though she was tempted as they bathed together. *No, I need friends here, not lovers. I can do that myself.*

One of the books Demitrius gave her was a translation of the Kama Sutra. As the images came to her mind, her right hand moved between her legs and began massaging. That evening she missed supper and lit a lamp when it got dark so she could continue studying. She massaged herself gently, bringing herself just to the edge of orgasm, but not over it. She wanted to prolong the sensation, to bathe herself in the images, let them wash over her.

Harem Girl  
*by Fletchina Archer*

Finally, when she could read no more, she let the book drop to her side and opened her legs to her probing fingers until she began to shudder from head to toe over and over. Finally, sated, her hand dropped to her side and she fell into a deep sleep, the lamp still burning.

## CHAPTER 8

"You like the book?" Demetrius asked when he came to wake her the next morning. "You've been reading it?"

The translation of the *Kama Stura* lay open on her bed.

"Yes, I like it, but I can't quite understand all of it."

"Do you want some help?"

"If you have time?"

"My task here is to serve you, madam."

"Well, what does this word mean?" she asked pointing to the mysterious sequence of Arabic letters she did not understand.

"Ah, that's one of those words you were asking me about at the governor's house when you wanted to know if there was a Turkish word for voyeurism."

Theresa remained silent.

"It means ... giving a woman pleasure with the tongue."

"Kissing?"

"No, madam."

"Can you show me?"

"Madam?"

"Can you show me? Aksama told me you taught her the erotic arts. She taught me the little of the erotic arts that I know."

Theresa threw the covers aside and stretched herself across the width of the bed as Penelope showed her, what seemed so long ago. She slid her finger between her labia,

opened them to Demetrius's gaze, and started to stroke her clitoris.

"Won't you show me?"

He knelt on the floor as she draped her knees over his shoulders.

The warm moist pressure of his tongue on her clitoris barely moved, pulsating to the rhythm of her heartbeat that she heard in her ears as loud as the skin drums of the band she had heard at supper when Elma danced. She began to move her hips to the rhythm of Demetrius's tongue. His large strong hands grasped her thighs and drew her toward him.

The pace of his tongue decreased to nothing, until she felt only the warm pressure against her hardening clitoris. She stilled her hips. Suddenly, the pressure was gone, replaced by the lightness of a butterfly's wing as he circled her clitoris with the tip of his tongue barely touching her flesh. She felt her vagina swell, become receptive. She felt the fluids gush from deep inside her as the tip of Demetrius's tongue continued its spiraling movement out from and back in to her clitoris, now hard and erect. A long breath rasped out of her throat and she battled to inhale again.

The hands that engulfed her thighs released their grip and moved to the insides of her legs where the fingers spread her labia. Now the tongue tip, just as lightly, began to tickle the under side of her clitoris. She gasped again. She felt the orgasm coming, building from her center and vibrating her thighs and stomach. The firm warm pressure of the tongue replaced the tickling sensation that almost pushed her over

the edge. Slowly it began to pulse again. Again she matched the rhythm with her hips.

There were slower, firmer, longer strokes of the tongue on her clitoris. She increased the rhythm of her hips and the tongue strokes increased in measure. All the tides of her body surged together, and she was on the verge of an orgasm when the firm warm pressure replaced the stroking. His lips drew her clitoris into a firm embrace as his tongue lightly kissed it until she gasped. She began to breathe rapidly, shallowly, the long delayed orgasm overtaking her body until the pressure of his tongue calmed her body and breathing.

Short, rapid, but firm strokes on her clitoris caused her body to tremble again as the orgasm she'd been waiting for welled up through her body.

"Don't stop!" she commanded.

Her thighs and belly vibrated in a shimmy faster than she'd ever mastered practicing the dance. A deep breath filled her lungs and a wail of release escaped through her throat as her hips rotated around Demetrius's head, taking what he had given, demanding fulfillment. A deep spasm overtook her body and Demetrius's tongue kept up the pace. Again, a paroxysm overtook her, and again she gasped for breath and exhaled a moan of pleasure. The rhythm continued and convulsions overtook her. Her back arched and her thighs clamped against Demetrius's head. The pulsing cadence on her clitoris was constant. She struggled for breath, gulped for air, not able to find her voice as another tremor shook her body from head to toe. Then she floated weightless in the dark warmth of nothingness.

She didn't notice when Gordana and Dusana came into her apartment to sit on the foot of her bed.

"I've never seen anyone come that long" said Dusana.

"Or that strongly," said Gordana.

"Could you..."

"I am the servant of my mistress," said Demitrius. "I do what she directs me to do."

With great effort Theresa raised her head and whispered, "Show them, Demitrius. It's okay, show them what 'cunnilingus' means." Her head collapsed of its own weight and Theresa was oblivious to what followed, lost in her own balmy floating world.

Half an hour later, she was only dimly aware that Dusana crumpled in a quivering heap on the bed. She was beginning to perceive sound and light when Gordana collapsed on the other side of her.

"May I be of further service madam?" Demitrius asked primly, standing in the doorway.

Theresa heard sounds gurgle from her throat to say, "Aaah, no, thanks," and shut her eyes again.

\* \* \* \*

Theresa awoke in the front seat of Richard's car, her labia opening to his clumsy touch. She drew back from him and when his face followed hers, she pushed him away.

"No," she said. "What are we doing here?"

"Making out?" Richard said puzzled.



"Stop it, take me home," she demanded, confused at the sudden change around her. "Get me out of here," she said, panic overtaking her.

*Relax. Relax into it. Confront the unexpected with calm.*

She began breathing deeply as she'd learned in karate to calm her body and her mind.

Richard moved in deliberate slow motion toward the driver's seat, slid behind the steering wheel, and took an eon of time to turn the key in the ignition to bring the engine rumbling to life.

*How did I get here?*

"Are you okay?" Richard asked as he backed and turned into the lane to return to the paved road.

"No, I'm not okay. I want to go home."

"Okay, okay, that's where I'm taking you. What's the matter."

"You wouldn't understand."

"Try me," he said as he steered into the traffic.

"I just don't want to be here."

Richard drove silently through the traffic and stopped in front of her house.

"Will I see you tomorrow?" he asked as she opened the car door.

"I don't know."

*I hope not. This is the house, but how do I get home?*

She opened the door to the warm embrace of the smell of chocolate-chip cookies baking and the sight of her dad sitting in the recliner, his chin on his chest, newspapers piled on the

floor beside him, in front of the incessant babble of the television.

"Hi, hon, have some cookies."

Inside she felt a scream of desperation rise in her heart, breaking through to her throat, but she was unable to say a word.

"Are you okay, dear? Have a cookie. That will make everything better."

\* \* \* \*

When Theresa awoke, Dusana was shaking her.

"Wake up," she said in Turkish. "Wake up, you were screaming in your sleep."

"Did you have a bad dream?" Gordana asked, gently stroking Theresa's thick blond hair. "It's okay, you are here now. With us. Everything is alright."

"Yes. Oh my God, what a nightmare," Theresa answered, laying her head on Dusana's chest.

Gordana snuggled behind Theresa and Dusana hugged Theresa to her. Theresa was sandwiched in their caring warmth.

"Do you want to tell us about the nightmare?"

"No. I mean, I would, but I can't remember it all. Just that it was frightening."

"I had dreams like that when I first got here too," Dusana said. "About my father, my family."

"And I dreamed of monsters," said Gordana.

Theresa embraced Dusana, feeling her small breasts against her own more ample ones. Then she turned on her

back and put one arm under each of her friends to draw them to her. They came willingly.

"Were you watching us?" Theresa asked.

"Yes. There are peep holes everywhere around here,"  
Dusana said.

"We were watching last night," Gordana admitted.

"She stood behind me and did for me what you were doing for yourself as I watched. Then we traded places."

"There's a word for that, you know?"

"What," Gordana asked, "Peeping? Spying?"

"Pervert?" Dusana suggested.

"Voyeurism," Theresa answered.

"Yes, and what your Demitrius was doing. That's called ...  
cunni ... something?"

"Cunnilingus."

"Your Turkish is better than ours." Dusana said.

"When it comes to cunnilingus and voyeurism, may be. I'm getting quite a vocabulary."

"Have you ever had it like that? Like Demitrius did?"  
Dusana asked.

"No," the other two sighed in answer.

"Me either."

Theresa shuddered at the fading memory of her nightmare and hugged the other two women to her for comfort.

"Are you two..."

"Lovers?" Dusana supplied.

"Yes," they both answered in unison.

Then, with a look at Gordana, Dusana said, "Would you like to join us?"

Harem Girl  
*by Fletchina Archer*

"It doesn't seem like the Sultan is at all interested. He still hasn't called us, and it doesn't make any difference what we do here in the harem. As long as there are no men involved. Not that I would complain if one managed to get in and..." Gordana let her words fade into the air.

"Let's see if we can get some lunch," Dusana suggested.

"We'd better get a bath before we do anything else," Theresa recommended.

The three left the apartment hand in hand, Theresa in the center, and slowly made their way to the hot bath to rub each other with the pumice stones, lather each other with oils, and float in the warm embrace of the water.

## CHAPTER 9

"You have a visitor, madam," Demetrius announced through the opened door to Theresa's apartment. Inside were the three young women who had been keeping each other company for the past weeks.

"Who is it?"

"Me," said Penelope. "I came on Milos' ship." She looked around the apartment and took in the other two young women, sitting on the bed with their robes open.

"Thanks, Demetrius," said Theresa as the eunuch withdrew.

"These are my friends, Gordana and Dusana. They're odalisques too."

"What kind of lover is the sultan?" Penelope asked in Greek.

"None of us would know."

"What did she say?" asked Dusana.

"It would be easier if you spoke Turkish," admonished Theresa.

"But my Turkish is so limited."

"Most people here don't understand Greek, But I couldn't tell you who does and who doesn't," Theresa answered. "Try it. It'll be fine. She asked what kind of lover the sultan was," Theresa answered, shifting into Turkish.

The other two women laughed.

"But I can tell you Penelope is a wonderful lover," continued Theresa with a knowing look at her companions.

"You must be tired after your trip," said Gordana.

"Wouldn't you like to join us in the bath?"

"I would," Penelope answered slowly. "Yes, I would."

"Come with us, then," said Dusana shrugging out of her robe and lifting Penelope's demure chiton over her head.

"She's all hairy," Gordana commented.

"What did she say?" asked Penelope.

"Just a comment on your body hair. Women of the harem find it unclean. I'll get Demetrius to shave you."

"I'll just be unclean, if it's alright with you."

"Sure, it's fine with me, but we're losing our friends. Come on, speak Turkish."

Gordana ran her fingers lightly over Penelope's breasts, down her stomach, and touched her thick black pubic hair.

"It's kind of exciting," she commented. "Can she keep it that way?"

"Yes," said Penelope. "I would like that. Shall we bathe now?" The words were still slow, and it was obvious it was an effort for her to speak Turkish.

After the four women bathed, Gordana and Dusana lingered in the hot water while Theresa and Penelope returned to the apartment.

On the way, Penelope whispered to Theresa in Greek, "My father sent a message, but I need to talk to you outside. Is that possible?"

"Why?"

"He said something about the walls having ears."

"Ah, yes. He was right. Let's get dressed. Here, wear these." Theresa handed Penelope baggy pants and a silk Ottoman coat.

"We can go into the courtyard, through there, where you came into this building. There no one can hear what we say unless they come close to us, and if they do, we'll talk about something else. It's alright to speak Greek, but remember that half the people here can understand it."

"This is like being in heaven. You have hot baths and comfortable beds and these clothes..."

"It's just as you said it would be."

"Are those two girls your lovers?"

"Yes."

"Do you think I could be with you tonight?"

"Of course."

The two women left the darkness of the interior for the bright light of the courtyard beyond and strolled to the center of the empty space. The courtyard was surrounded by four walls like the one they had exited, a doorway in the center of each one. As they neared the center of the plaza, they saw they were alone.

"Father wanted me to tell you that..."

Before Penelope could get her message out a group of Janissaries came through the doorway to their right. Theresa recognized the man they held in their grasp as the sultan. She knew this was not right. The Sultan ordered the Janissaries, and they shouldn't lay a hand on him, much less tug him along like this. It was clear he was their captive.

"Penelope, go back where we were and wait for me there."  
The dozen Janissaries were now inside the courtyard. "Now."

"What will you do?"

"Just go!" she answered, annoyed. "Watch and you'll see."

Penelope ran back to the doorway of the harem and the Janissaries continued toward the center of the courtyard.

"Release the sultan," commanded Theresa.

"Says an odalisque," laughed the one who was in charge.

"Says this odalisque," said Theresa firmly as she shrugged out of her coat. Under it were the baggy pants and a shirt.

"Now."

The Janissaries laughed and continued on their way toward Theresa. She was in the sparring position and launched her palm at the underside of the captain's nose. She didn't have time to register his expression as he fell to the ground. She pivoted into a roundhouse kick to the next Janissary's stomach. Another came at her with a pike. She stepped aside and guided the pike into another's stomach as she wrenched it from the grasp of the soldier. A fist to a solar plexus, a left kick to a chin, an elbow to a chest. Everything was in slow motion now, just as it was when she sparred so long ago for sport. The soldiers came at her as though they were walking through water.

She twisted a pike from the hands of a fighter and slashed two others with one arcing slice of the weapon. Two of her opponents held the Sultan and the other two dropped their pikes.

"Now, please release the Sultan," Theresa asked with exaggerated politeness, "If you would be so good."



"You're the Greek, aren't you?" the sultan asked. "Gift of the Governor of Izmir."

"Yes, lord," Theresa answered looking at her feet, as court etiquette demanded.

"Look at me," the sovereign of the Ottoman Empire commanded.

Theresa raised her eyes to take in the Sultan's brown-eyed gaze.

Penelope rushed across the courtyard.

"What is going on?" she asked.

"I don't know," answered Theresa.

"I understand Greek," the Sultan said in a strange sounding accent. "Who is this?" he asked of Penelope.

"A friend from Rhodes. Penelope, daughter of Stavros, the merchant who gave me to the Governor of Izmir."

"I owe your father a great debt," the sultan said.

Another group of Janissaries filled the courtyard. "Take these traitors and question them until they talk," the sultan ordered.

The loyal Janissaries escorted the traitors who could walk and dragged the ones who could not, toward another door that led to the dungeons.

"That was my father's message," Penelope said.

"Where did you learn to do these things?" the sultan asked in amazement.

"In the North, lord, where I came from. From Chinese monks of a monastery called Shao Lin. It is they who taught me."

"Can you teach my guard?"

"Yes, lord."

"What were you saying?" the sultan addressed Penelope.

"My father's message for Theresa was that he had learned that the head of the merchant's guild was going to try to capture your ... highness ... your lordship ... your holiness..." she stuttered over the title.

"Someone was going to try to capture me?"

"Yes, lord," Penelope took her cue from Theresa and spoke in Turkish.

"Who?"

"The one who is the big man of the Merchant's Guild. My father is a merchant. He heard this from one of his ships' captains. When he heard this news he sent me to tell Theresa so she could warn you."

"Ah, my rival, the son of the one was my father's favorite before my mother. Yes, he is hiding now at the house of the Merchant's guild."

A group of eunuchs had gathered around the sultan in the courtyard.

"Vizier," said the Sultan, "Have the Janissaries take the house of the head of the Merchant's guild. I won't have this. Take the Janissaries who tried to take me ... take them outside and execute them. Display the heads around the palace on pikes."

The vizier bowed and said, "As you command, lord." He backed away from the sultan.

"Captain of Janissaries," the sultan continued. "You will organize my guard to learn the dance of the Shao Lin monks from this girl. What is your name again?"

"Theresa, lord."

"...from this girl Theresa."

"Yes, lord," said the captain of Janissaries as he backed away from the group.

"I would like to bathe, now, Lord. I have become covered with sweat," Theresa requested.

"Yes, very well."

Theresa started to back away with Penelope when she heard the sultan say, "Wait, Theresa, do you dance as well? I mean how is it called ... the dance..."

"Yes, lord, I dance."

"It would please me if you would dance for me tonight at supper."

"It will be so, lord," Theresa said with a bow as she continued to back toward the door to the harem.

"Instruct the musicians," the sultan commanded one of the eunuchs. "Theresa will dance tonight."

\* \* \* \*

"Shao Lin monks?" Penelope asked as the two shared the baths for the second time that day. "You learned that dance of death from Chinese monks in the North?"

Theresa was silent.

"You never explained your clothing."

"I told you then as I tell you now, ask me no questions and I shall tell you no lies."

"Ah, as you will. Will you still be with me tonight?"

"That depends on the sultan."

## CHAPTER 10

When Penelope and Theresa left the apartment to go to supper they found Demetrius waiting for them in the hall.

"Were you watching us?" Theresa asked.

"Of course. I saw that you were teaching her some of the erotic arts."

"What does 'erotic art' mean?" asked Penelope.

"Lovemaking," said the eunuch.

"But that's not the reason I'm here. I am supposed to take you, Theresa, to the front of the dining hall. The sultan wants you to dance tonight."

"And Penelope?"

"She can take your place at the table with Gordana and Dusana."

The two women exchanged looks.

"It's alright with me," said Penelope.

"As the sultan decrees," answered Theresa as the they walked down the hall toward the dining hall.

"You see," Theresa said as they entered the hall, "you were right to think this would be like going to heaven."

Penelope took in the grandeur of the hall, the silk and brocade costumes of the women, the eunuchs serving every table, the endless supply of food and drink.

"Who are they with the sour faces up there?" Penelope asked with a nod toward the front of the hall.

Demetrius answered, "That would be Elma, the sultan's current favorite, or if the palace gossip has any truth to it, the

soon to be former favorite, and the sultana, the sultan's mother and aunt of Elma."

"Oooh," Penelope said with a look toward Theresa, "your competition."

"I'm satisfied where I am," Theresa answered with a blush. "I'm not any more anxious than you for..."

"Men?"

"Yes."

Demitrius and Theresa left Penelope sitting on the floor at the low round table with Dusana and Gordana, and proceeded to the front of the hall. Whispers followed them all the way. Theresa sat by the sultana and Demitrius took his place behind to serve her.

There was little talk around Theresa's table, but plenty of glares and daggers cast from the eyes of the sultana and Elma. The musicians started and Demitrius leaned down to whisper to Theresa that it was time for her to perform.

She stood up, kicked off her slippers and shrugged off her coat. In sheer black silk pants slit up to her thighs and a black silk top that tied between her breasts to support and display them, she stood where she was and remembered that it was all in the hands. Hands, arms and neck, then the feet, left foot, hip up, hip down she proceeded onto the floor in front of the dais where the sultan sat with the Vizier. The throbbing of the drum became insistent, then quickened as she began her shimmy.

In the back of her mind Demitrius's tongue on her clitoris was the drumbeat and her shimmy was the beginning of the often-postponed orgasm that so overwhelmed her. She

backed out of the shimmy, back to the hip work, then the legs, and finally she stood and moved only her stomach muscles to show how well isolated they were. Her eyes closed now, she began the shimmy and the drummer set a frenzied pace until, with a final slap, he stopped. She extended her left foot and slid her right foot back into a split and bowed over her left knee with her hands stretched out to the floor.

"Arise," commanded the sultan.

She stood, looking at her feet.

"Come with me," the Sultan said, his hand extended to her.

\* \* \* \*

The silence of the hall was broken by thunderous applause from all but the two women in front.

"What's happening?" asked Penelope as Theresa disappeared with the sultan.

"Lucky girl, the sultan has chosen her. I'll bet she's the new favorite." Dusana looked longingly at the space where Theresa had been dancing. "Have you ever seen anyone dance like that? Such a shimmy. Such control. Elma isn't even close. She looks like a dancing bear in comparison."

"But who are we to talk? She will be the favorite for a long time, too. She's not only beautiful, she's smart." Gordana bit into a slice of peach. "I'll bet she's pregnant within weeks. I'll bet her son becomes the next Sultan."

"But why is Demetrius going with them?"

"To serve her," Dusana took a piece of baklava from the table.

"She won't be a virgin tomorrow." Gordana's voice was wistful.

Penelope looked at her, but knew when to say nothing.

"Lucky girl. Maybe she will ask the sultan to call us once in a while, now that she's the favorite." Dusana reached for another baklava.

"We need to put on a few pounds. Look at us. We look like a couple of European peasants."

"That's what we are."

Penelope struggled to understand the banter.

"Come stay with us tonight," Dusana looked deep into Penelope's eyes. "We need the company now that our lover is gone. Theresa told us you know the poetry of the Greek Sappho?"

"I do." Penelope reached for the baklava. "It would please me to be with friends of Theresa's."

The musicians started another melody as the clapping tapered off. No one rose to dance.

\* \* \* \*

As the sultan's favorite until the end of his days, Theresa learned the ways of Islam and the Prophet's way of justice and mercy. Theresa was one of the few to travel beyond the harem to visit her friends on Rhodes and the villages of the ordinary people. She came to see the wisdom of many of the empire's ways, but she remembered and renewed her conversations about justice and fate with Milos, the skipper. She put into practice the concepts of justice in the empire and brought up her son in the ways of mercy and fairness. Thus

Harem Girl  
*by Fletchina Archer*

he came to practice karate and speak Greek. Thus he came to be the mightiest of the sultans of the Ottomans.

Except for the sultan, no man ever touched her. She did, however, introduce the sultan to the pleasures of her two European peasant friends from the harem.

Demitrius was very old when the sultana breathed her last in his arms, looking up into the solid serenity of his face. It was he who tearfully informed the sultan of the sultana's death. When the sultan asked what he would like to do, now that he was free, Demitrius asked only continue in the harem.

By then Gordana and Dusana had returned to their homelands where the Vizier had arranged good marriages for them.

Penelope lived out her days raising the children she had with Milos and making verses in Greek that were scented with the aromas of another time and place. Though she kept them, she never learned the secrets of the strange northern girl's clothing. Of Shee Ka Go and Theresa's parents in the north, no one heard another word for she was never again struck by lightening.

THE END



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