

Āehrāzād

In this night of dark nights, I tell you a story, my beloved women of this day, of this age.

Scoff you might, at the harems of times past. You relish the freedom you are given in this present you are in, to have a single man each, to yourselves. You believe it to be proper. You consider the ancients and their customs. In the harems, you imagine the ageing brides, replaced year by year with younger, supple ones. Ageing women, relegated down the rungs to old forgotten crones. Flocks of women swallowing bitter waters of envy, of heartache, of abandonment, you think. So you do.

I shall show you a different truth.

There are truths unrecorded by the scribes of yore. History written by the masculine. Some secrets were to be buried in the deeps. One secret I shall now tell you of, beloved. For your consideration.

In those beautiful times, we kept the order of the world.

We knew many things of men, and how to tend to their delicate gardens, to help them grow to their most beautiful forms. We knew how to weave reality, threading silk through our master, our Sultan.

We knew many things of women. How a woman begins, young and fragile, bursting with seeds of insecurity, desire for admiration, a crave, an ache to be of preciousness. A young woman needs a man to exalt her.

We knew that without tender gardening, seeds grow into thistles. Gentle girls filled with doubt will grow to hate of self, will wield thorns of cruelty, will wither inside.

We knew that with tender gardening, with time, a woman comes to her power. A woman in power craves much more than what a man can give. She comes unto herself, affirmed from within, not from without. No matter how powerful and strong, and full of charm and stories a man is, he will not suffice. A woman comes to tend to herself. And in time, to others.

The tender gardeners. Our elders. As a woman comes to maturity, she withdraws from the birth cycle of her womb, and begins the cycle of female grace and glory. Her interest in men subsides to the carnal, for they are forever children, caught in the sweet trap of their dreaming selves, in their desires of power and dominance.

A woman in her power turns elsewhere, to find the deepest of companionship among her fellow women. A celebration. A woman has, just like a man, so much love to give to other women.

We'd gather, in the warm evenings, in the large temple hall of our harem. First to pass around the Sip of Death, for those who needed it, so that our babies would arrive only when we wished for them to, scattered across time. We thus abolished unneeded conflict and sibling rivalry. Then, to share and consider the day's events, discuss what gentle truths tonight's soon to be Summoned one must whisper softly upon the ear of our Sultan to keep him slave to our notions of kindness and love and justice, subdue intentions of warring, of the mongrel fight, the playstuff of children who grow into men, they cannot help themselves.

We'd consider all opinions. The council will make a final determination. The triad council. A seductress, a mother, an elder. A sacred triangle of wisdom. That is why, over time, this way came to be known, through words that changed with languages and civilizations, as the Three Fates.

Yes, women that we are, so much weaker in muscle than men. That is part of our path: to discover how to rule and heal without domination of the physical. But show me the man who can stand in the just way of three Fates.

By decree of our order, each of the triad championed a different fate, and argued for it. Thus, we always had three paths to consider. Three alternative realities to contemplate with headedness.

An Order. A word of our making, metamorphing through times and temples, keeping its true essence, for we brought order.

When order was decided upon, the Summoned one would leave for the night, to do her labour of love making, to take her pleasures with the Sultan man flesh. Then, the rest of us would take leisure, together.

Some would play the lute and tambourine, others would sing, some would dance, frolicking with colourful sashes of translucent silks.

Some of us would be elsewhere, tending to our young. As in all things, we took turns, and were free from constant child-minding, our children were raised by us all.

And in our sacred hall, we would, as evening deepened, take those pleasures of the flesh with one another, to keep ourselves healthy and soaring. A woman's love is a thing of depths. Of the flesh, of the mind, of soul, of spirit.

Yes, in the harems we all knew the ways of a woman taking pleasure with another woman. True, for most of us it was never the same primordial desire of the body, the raw pounding lust we had for men. It is a different form of craving. Do you need to be lusting after yourself to love yourself, to make love to yourself? You do not. Lust was not required in the giving and receiving of compassion to each other.

At other times, we would simply caress one another softly, whisper stories and thoughts, share laughter, all in our temple of the heart.

In the small hours of the night, those of us with the dark gifts consulted with the omens, and signs, by bones and cards and leaves of drinks far bitter than tea. At times, we would be told of dark deeds required of us. Tending to a garden asks for weeding. Weeds of our very own youngs, if leadership, integrity, what is just and good and proper was not to be found in their souls. Sweet sadness upon our hearts, songs of spells upon our tongues we did such deeds, and others.

Thus, order was kept. Ours and the one of our world. When the omens spoke of it, an elder will depart to a place of bidding, to set forward another temple-harem. Show a young Sultan bride the order, the ways. And then another and another, until their palace was warm and soft and full of new life and love. And order. We threaded silk throughout the world as we knew it. And the days and nights were nectar.

But the cycle was broken.

I will not talk today of how and why and when.

I will not pass judgement.

I will not weep.

We failed our garden.

Order was scattered.

The joy of the harem was exiled. In the absence of wise gardeners, it became exactly what you imagined it to be. Cats of women. Dogs of men.

Beloved, it will be many moons, and suns will turn round and round before the order returns. But, my women, look me in the eyes and dare tell me you don't feel that very pulse

in the depth of bone and soul - that when we take the silken, subtle shadow reign again, as we did once before, it will be a beautiful and just world for everyone.

This secret truth I tell you of - not much survived of it in the writings.

Hints, glimpses, twisted through fabrications.

Know now, it was not me alone who whispered 1001 sweet fables at a Sultan's ear to help him rule wisely. It was me and a thousand of my sacred sisters-lovers.