

The Coup

You would call me a whore. Do not deny it dear reader. Yours is a time of compartmentalization, of analysis and categorization. If one does this then one is that, and then one surely must do this, for one has become that. Such small logic. You seek perspectives to not entrap yourself in the little world that is your own. Perspective to reach further and categorize further, to make your world smaller yet, and safer yet. Thinking you've escaped the masses and hoisted yourself above the abyss, seeing what others have not.

Pathetic attempt to control your surroundings. To entitle yourself to masterdom.

Let me give you some perspective then, for mine is a time of blood.

I do not care for where you place me or what you name me. For I am Roxelana concubine to Suleiman the Magnificent!

Not so magnificent if you ask me. Rather small in fact. But it is the lot of men that they seek to enlarge themselves by accomplishing grand endeavours. And so you revel in their stories and their deeds.

Let me tell you. Men are fools. For not one has ever returned to my bed lengthened. They think that their exploits make them monumental, that they possess the power of a thousand horses. Strong, enduring, energetic and broad! I do not know of horses in your lands but here in the Ottoman Empire, from what I myself gather, we must have the lamest, fastest and puniest horses in the world.

You think me arrogant. It must be easy for a woman, you tell yourself. "For you must not prove the size of your organ nor must you perform and prove yourself like man must".

Men are fools. For we must perform always, prove our worth every day of our lives or risk becoming the victim of men's quest to elongate. A man feels small so he must show all what colossus he is.

Being of simple minds, men only know how to do so in aggression. And so, we suffer. We admire in death the great conquests of men. Like cattle feeding their ego.

Yet we are also the receptacles of their undertaking. When spent they lie next to us, nude, shrivelled, empty and vulnerable it is through us they desire to measure their success.

And so the wheel of men's arrogance and miniscule turns.

Through one of his conquests, Suliman acquired me. The daughter of a Ruthenian priest I was enslaved by Crimean Tartars during a slave raid and later gifted to their master. Brought to the great imperial city I was thrown into the Sultan's Harem. I learned fast how to survive. Through murder, outmanoeuvring and political plays I became the sultan's favourite, his concubine.

With me he was the most powerful, grandest, MAGNIFICENT men of all. Or so I told him. Through me he thought himself master of the world. And thanks to me he almost did.

For you think that it was Suleiman who had the idea to create the trade routes with the Mughals and wrote the letters to Akhbar, the great (another man who had to prove his worth). You think Suleiman designed the campaigns that brought the Safavids to their knees? Or that he composed Kanun-i-Osmani, the legal reform of the Ottoman Empire?

I gasped, then I whispered, then I talked. Finally I commanded.

But 37 other voices are gasping in the Harem. Thousands others seek to make the empire theirs. And last but not least Suleiman himself might bring destruction to it. I cannot let it happen. I have from the Sultans bed created a legend, and enriched a nation. What was the Empire before I embraced it?

So you understand dear reader what I must now do. I must seize the Golden Throne and imprison Suleiman.

I have given him a son, which will in the absence of the father serve as puppet and front to my reign. I have promised to the general of his Janissaries, his elite guard, the only thing Suleiman would never give him: any woman from the Sultans Harem. Finally the Janissaries themselves will receive gold and lands.

A coup is no easy thing.

If someone betrays me before my forces have seized the key points in the palace I will be beheaded. If enough men stay loyal to the Sultan I will be beheaded. If the populace hears of a woman seizing power before the Sultan has abdicated to my son, I will be beheaded.

I hear steps. So to you dear reader I leave this letter.

Mine is a time of blood.

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