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Penetrating the fantasy of the harem

By Susan Dooley
Newhouse News Service

Books

The harem was a secret world. Because it was unknowable to men, then and now, it became a sensual fantasy in which hundreds of willing women disposed themselves in diaphanous clothes, ready to do the bidding of their master.

If a woman was to have her own fantasy about life in that cushioned kingdom, it was to dream of days spent in voluptuous ease, covered with jewels while slaves brought baskets of dates and pomegranates.

The women in the harem did live in such luxury, with everything available but freedom, as Alev Lytle Croutier makes clear in her fascinating "Harem: The World Behind the Veil" (Abbeville Press, $35).

It is not an easy world to penetrate. There were few women who kissed and lived to tell what life was like with a passionate pasha. For many, the end came when the lord tired of them and had them put into sacks and drowned, the usual way of getting rid of aging or unsatisfactory concubines.

Ms. Croutier's story is not one of sexual excess but of numbing boredom in a world where the thing one did was to wait: wait for an opportunity to become the favorite; wait for a chance to bear a son; wait in fear lest the son be killed by a rival mother; wait for small outings, where the women, heavily veiled, were escorted to a market or to a rural spot for a picnic.

Alev Lytle Croutier grew up in Turkey, in a world where the harems had not been that long abolished.

She tells of being befriended as a child by one of the last of the eunuchs, those unfortunate slaves who were stripped of their manhood so that they could safely serve as guards in the women's quarters.

She gives the book a depth that makes it far more than a titillating glance at an exotic custom by weaving in the stories of her own childhood, the experiences of older relatives in what was, after all, not merely a regal custom, but a religious one.

"One of the slips of parchment that the Archangel Gabriel passed on to Mohammed said: 'If your wives do not obey you, chastise them. If one wife does not suffice, take four.' "

And, writes Ms. Croutier, "While the wealthy lords kept opulent harems that were smaller versions of the Grand Harem, with numerous eunuchs and odalisques, the poor contented themselves with keeping two wives in one small room, a mere curtain separating them."

At the top, in the palace where the Grand Harem stood hidden behind latticed windows, the sultan reigned supreme. If he was cruel, as he often was, his brutalities were not just limited to women. The sons of the harem, the brothers and male relatives of the sultan, were trapped too.

The richness of Ms. Croutier's book lies not just in the fact that she has pieced all the scraps about life in the seraglio, but that she has also tried to give a context in which to view what seems an Eastern world of exotic cruelty.

The secrecy of the harem fired the imagination of numerous artists, and Ms. Croutier's book is beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated with photographs, prints and paintings from artists as diverse as Ingres and Matisse, showing how each reached into fantasy to render the image of the odalisque.

AIDS drug given unsanctioned tests

Scripps Howard News Service

Health

SAN FRANCISCO — When news of a promising new AIDS drug called Compound Q was first revealed by the University of California at San Francisco on April 12, activist Martin Delaney decided this time, with this drug, old patterns must be broken.

And they were — in a manner unprecedented in this 8-year-old epidemic.

For the first time, a medical protocol was set up for underground AIDS drug testing. The two San Francisco physicians who designed the trial say they are following rigorous medical standards and expect to publish their findings in a medical journal.

The trial, which is bypassing normal federal approval processes in an attempt to get speedier answers about Compound Q's effectiveness, threatens to shake the entire system of drug development for AIDS. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is investigating.

Drs. Larry Waites and Alan Levin said they had no choice but to set up the underground trial.

"Doses of this were coming in," said Waites. "They were going to be widely used ... I take care of my patients."

Delaney and the physicians, in essence, established a four-city underground drug trial that, so far, has treated 42 patients in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Ft. Lauderdale.

They say they consulted with University of California researcher Dr. Michael McGrath, who discovered trichosanthin's rare ability to kill virus-infected cells in laboratory studies. McGrath last week denied giving them advice but did acknowledge he has had "infrequent telephone" conversations with AIDS activists on "rumors that some form of Q was being administered to people."

They also say they intend to publish findings within two to three months — a speed that could obviate the importance of human test results expected later this year from an official safety trial.

AMSA Finals

Finalists were selected Tuesday in the artist division (ages 19-30) of the American Music Scholarship Association World Piano Competition at the Omni Netherland Plaza Hotel.

Three pianists will compete in the last round of the event, a concert with the AMSA Symphony conducted by David Loebel, at 8:15 tonight in the Omni Hall of Mirrors. The finalists and their concertos:

Adrienne Krausz, 22 (Hungary) — Liszt, Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major; Gerardo Vila, 24 (Argentina) — Brahms, Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major; Svitoslava Zumarova, 27 (USSR) — Chopin, Concerto No. 2 in F Minor.

Fourth place in the competition was awarded to Christopher Basso, 29 (U.S.); fifth prize winner is Claude Collet 23, (France); Svetlana Belsky 23, (USSR) and Eleanor Bindman 23, (USSR) tied for sixth.

—Mary Ellyn Hutton

Peterman

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pass as easily for a yachtsman as he could a rancher.

Instead he stuffs his rich brown leather bag — the catalog's counterfeit mailbag, inspired by the old-fashioned mailman's bag — with papers and hurries off to a meeting with accountants and lawyers.

Peterman's office is filled with whatever has captured his fancy. A model airplane hangs on wire from the ceiling. A drafting table sits in a corner. There's a walking stick and Shaker seed boxes. One wall displays a picture of Babe Ruth. A spittoon sits on the floor next to the desk, and across the way Peterman's old baseball glove is draped over the back of a chair.

Peterman has been married almost 25 years. He and his wife Audrey have four children. He is a native of West Nyack, N.Y.; the couple has lived in Lexington the past 11 years. A Marine Corps Reserve veteran, Peterman has worked in sales for General Foods and Dole.

He had the idea for a mail-order company in November 1986. Three months later, he began offering the dusters.

"I choose what I like," says Peterman. "I'm not into fashion or design. I can't tell what you're going to like, so I do what I like.

"What I choose has to have charisma, a factual romance about it. It must be functional.

> "I choose what I like. I'm not into fashion or design. I can't tell what you're going to like, so I do what I like."
> — John Peterman, mail-order merchant

We don't sell anything I won't wear or use myself. I wear the FDR cape; I will wear the swimsuit. The Irish cloak, of course, is for women, but I like a woman who would wear that."

He sells a couple of sweaters inspired by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, an actual fireman's coat, a grip that was inspired by a plumber's bag.

"Sometimes things are overengineered," Peterman said, "and sometimes there is just poor workmanship. I hate shirtails that don't stay in your pants; I hate buttons that break."

A business analyst evaluating the company wrote that Peterman is a "talented, possibly great merchant."

The allure begins with the catalog. As you flip through it, you find yourself imagining spending a night at the Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, or sipping a single-malt Scotch in a buffalo-plaid shirt on a chilly evening.

"I couldn't believe it at first, either," reads the ad for the Malone pants. "But I wore them, washed them, wore them again through vicious wild blackberry vines and stinging nettles and washed them again."

Peterman teams up with a writer in New York, Don Staley, on the ad copy.

"We sit down and talk about an item and why I like it," says Peterman. "Most of what you read in the copy is me."

"I always wanted to cross the Sahara, and the Gobi, by foot," begins the ad for the Shepheard's Hotel robe. "But I didn't. I did not swim the Hellespont. Didn't ascend Mont Blanc. Didn't read all the books I had to read. Ached to fly a Ford trimotor *anywhere*, even to St. Louis, but didn't."

A businessman in Baltimore read that and called. He told Peterman that he was going to fly a Ford tri-motor to St. Louis. Would Peterman like for him to stop in Lexington and pick Peterman up?

Of course, said Peterman.

Orders come in from Moscow, Korea, Japan, the Philippines. Orders come from Ralph Lauren, Gloria Vanderbilt, Emmylou Harris, George Carlin, Kenny Rogers, Kelly McGillis.

"I adore my Peterman coat," writes a customer from Maine. "I feel like a million bucks when I wear it."

"We struggle through life, put up with a lot of frustrations," says Peterman. "We deserve a little reward. If it can make you feel a little better it's worth it."

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LOEWS
FLORENCE (MAIN ST. FLORENCE PLAZA) 371-5444
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:40 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
BLACK RAIN (R) 12:30 2:40 5:00 7:20 9:40
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:30 2:40 5:00 7:30 10:00
SEE NO EVIL HEAR NO EVIL(R) 12:30 3:10 5:20 7:40 9:50
PET SEMATARY(R) 1:00; 3:10 5:20 7:50 10:10
FIELD OF DREAMS(PG) 12:40 2:50 5:05 7:20 9:35
DEAD POET'S SOCIETY(PG) 2:00; 4:30 7:15 9:45
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 12:20 2:20 4:30 7:20 9:50
R-Rated 1:10 3:20 5:40 7:45 9:55
275 EAST 5679 MONTGOMERY RD. 561-8900
DEAD POET'S SOCIETY(PG) 1:00 4:00 7:00 9:50
PET SEMATARY(R) 12:45 3:15 5:30 7:40 9:45
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 12:15 2:40 5:10 7:50 10:10
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:30; 5:00; 7:30; 10:00
COVEDALE 4590 GLENWAY AVE. 921-7373
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:30; 5:00; 7:30; 10:00
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 12:15 2:30 4:40 7:40 9:50
CAROUSEL 8400 BRAMLINE RD. 891-3210
SEE NO EVIL HEAR NO EVIL(R) 1:30; 3:40; 5:50; 8:00; 10:10
DEAD POET'S SOCIETY(PG) 2:00; 4:40; 7:20; 9:50
NORTHGATE 9727 COLERAIN AVE. 385-5565
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 12:15; 2:30; 5:15; 7:40; 9:55
PET SEMATARY(R) 12:15; 2:45; 5:15; 7:45; 9:50
FIELD OF DREAMS(PG-13) 12:30; 2:35; 5:15; 7:50; 10:05
DEAD POET'S SOCIETY(PG) 1:00; 3:45; 7:15; 9:45;
R-Rated 12:30 2:50 5:20 8:00 10:10
SEE NO EVIL HEAR NO EVIL(R) 12:40; 3:05; 5:25; 7:50; 10:05
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:30; 5:00 7:30 10:00
SKYWALK 22 CONVENTION WAY 651-5353
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 2:00; 4:30; 7:00; 9:30
SEE NO EVIL HEAR NO EVIL(R) 1:15; 3:30; 5:40; 7:50; 10:00
MARIEMONT 5906 WOODSTER PIKE 271-3237
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 1:15; 3:20; 5:35; 7:50; 10:00
FIELD OF DREAMS(PG) 1:00; 3:15; 5:30; 7:40; 9:25
KENWOOD 7964 MONTGOMERY RD. 793-6100
FIELDS OF DREAMS(PG) 1:15; 3:25; 5:30; 7:40; 9:55
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:30; 5:00; 7:30; 10:00
KENWOOD TOWNE CENTRE KENWOOD AT MONTGOMERY IN-LAW
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GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:40; 5:00; 7:40; 10:00
BLACK RAIN(R) 1:30; 4:20; 7:40; 10:05
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:00; 2:30; 5:00; 7:40 10:10
TRI-COUNTY 1-5 LONG VINE STATION PKWY. 771-2040
INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE(PG-13) 12:30 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
R-Rated (R) 12:30 2:40 4:55 7:10 9:30
PET SEMATARY(R) 12:10; 2:20; 4:30; 8:00; 10:10
SEE NO EVIL HEAR NO EVIL(R) 12:40; 2:50; 5:00; 7:40; 9:40
DEAD POET'S SOCIETY(PG) 1:30; 4:00; 7:20; 9:45
TRI-COUNTY 6-7 LONG VINE STATION PKWY. 771-0211
FIELD OF DREAMS(PG) 1:00; 3:10; 5:20; 7:40; 9:50
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE(PG-13) 1:10 3:20 5:30 7:50 10:00

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