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Short Story: The Man in The Chair

As with any dream, there was some confusion. For one thing, she was in the palace courtyard but Grand-mama was there and that dear old lady had been dead for a long time. All around her was a vast crowd of people. Then, with a sudden sense of terror, she realized that the man in The Chair was not her husband. The man's dress and mannerisms seemed Jewish and she did not recognize him. What was he doing there? Had there been a revolution? Her servants, her guards, and her husband were nowhere to be seen. She was alone and everything seemed wrong.

Suddenly the man in The Chair beckoned her forward. He did not speak or gesture, but with a great sense of dread she knew she must shove through the crowd and stand before The Chair. Her Grand-mama gave her a gentle push from behind as she used to do when shepherding her through the gardens of the old family villa. Suddenly, without having moved, she found herself standing before The Chair. From high above she heard a voice echo in her own language "ecce homo" - *behold The Man*. Irresistibly her face was drawn upwards to look into his eyes.

"You have not loved your husband or his mother as you have loved yourself," he said. "No," she answered, with an unexpected sense of guilt. "But your mother did not love you very well either, did she?" Tears streamed down her face, unbidden and uncontrollable. "No," she barely whispered. "There is much that must be remedied here," the man said gently. Suddenly Grand-mama was standing next to her. "Listen to him," Grand-mama said, "this fellow knows what he's doing."

Suddenly she was awake, the very earliest light of the day was filtering in through the drapes. Her husband was not beside her and from outside, in the palace courtyard, she heard the roar of a crowd shouting something unintelligible in their cacophonous language. That must be it, she thought, in my sleep I heard the noise of the crowd and made a dream of it. Then suddenly the emotion of what she had experienced in the dream rushed in on her—terrifying, gut-wrenching, and yet also holding out some tantalizing hope for healing.

Rising from bed she walked towards the balcony, peaked through the drapes, and gasped in horror. Her husband, in full legal regalia, was seated in The Chair interrogating a prisoner while the crowd looked on. In an instant she scribbled a note and sent her slave to run and give it to her husband. As she watched, hidden behind the drapes, she saw him read and quickly discard the note. Her heart sank. He had read but did not care. She had written: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

The prisoner looked up in her direction, and seemed to see her peeking through the drapes. His face was bruised but she was sure that she was looking once again into the face of the man from her dream: The Man in The Chair.

~ Jonathan Stepp