

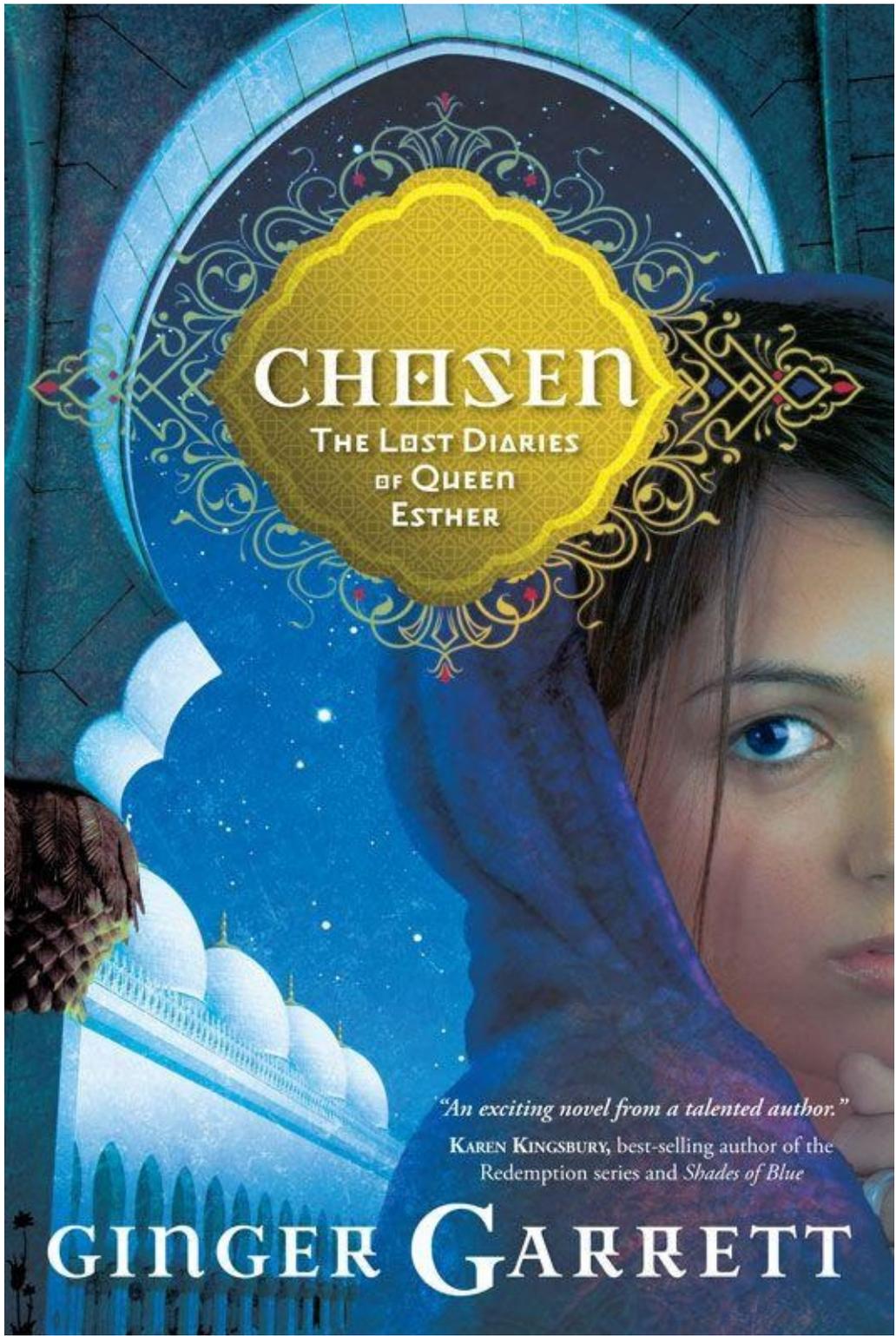
CHOSEN

THE LOST DIARIES
OF QUEEN
ESTHER

"An exciting novel from a talented author."

KAREN KINGSBURY, best-selling author of the
Redemption series and *Shades of Blue*

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What people are saying about ...

Chosen

“This book defies normal boundaries. It is not merely biblical fiction, nor is the diary structure all that important. What you have in your hands is a truly astonishing novel. Ginger Garrett shows great originality and even greater promise.”

Davis Bunn, best-selling author

“A story that is sure to be a classic! Exciting, dramatic, and filled with truth. A great read from the first page!”

Bodie and Brock Thoene, best-selling authors of the Zion Covenant Series and the A.D. Chronicles

“An exciting novel from a talented author.”

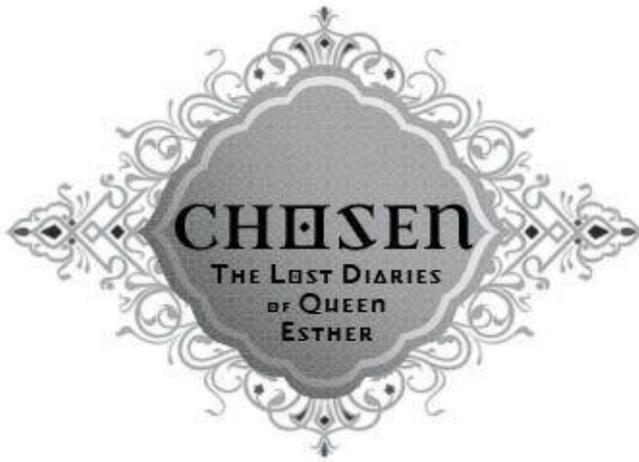
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“Chosen is a richly detailed retelling of Queen Esther’s story. The brave Jewish woman comes alive on the pages of a diary that will leave you wondering if the words are actually the queen’s or Ms. Garrett’s. A gem of a read.”

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LOST LOVES OF THE BIBLE
BOOK ONE

GINGER GARRETT

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transforming lives together

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Note to the Reader

These diaries, reproduced here in their entirety, were dated using an ancient Babylonian calendar. Explanation must be given so that the modern reader is not confused. Three dates are given at the top of each entry, including: month, the year of the king's reign, and the year after creation. Ancient calendars, of course, did not include the markers "BC," "AD," "BCE," or "CE." The "number of years after creation" was only a very rough estimate determined by early Jewish priests, using key historical dates given in the first inspired Scriptures.

The months were lunar months. At the first report from two reliable witnesses that a full moon had risen, the first day of the next month was declared. The months correspond roughly to ours, although their New Year began later:

Nisan	April
Iyyar	May
Sivan	June
Tammuz	July
Av	August
Elul	September
Tishri	October
Kheshvan	November
Kislev	December
Tevet	January
Shevat	February
Adar	March
Adar II	A leap year, occurring approximately every 3 years

In addition to understanding this dating system, we would like to call to your attention the special features we have added for further study and interest. The Persian Antiquities Authority has graciously allowed us to include news reports and academic commentary in an appendix to the diaries. We hope this will allow you, the reader, to better place these diaries in the context of Esther's world, and your own. We've indicated these features with a footnote to direct you to the corresponding article in the appendix.

INTRODUCTION

In September 1939, Hitler launches an unprovoked attack in Poland and begins his reign of terror. His first public proclamation after the invasion closes all synagogues, effective on the first day of the festival of Purim. Purim is the Jewish holiday that celebrates the heroism of one woman, Esther, and her triumph against the evil of Jewish genocide. Hitler was crafting a horrific annihilation for his Jewish captives, and Purim would give them a shining hope that the courage of even one woman might still be enough to stop him.

Hitler's men raced against time to destroy the synagogues and wipe the festival of Purim from the mind of every Jew. "Unless Germany is victorious," Hitler shrieked to his men, "Jews could then celebrate a second triumphant Purim festival!" Hitler may have hated the entire race, but he feared one woman. Even her dusty memory could threaten his bloody regime. Who was this woman who gave a madman pause? Could she even now call to her people across the centuries?

FROM THEARTNEWSPAPER.COM, INTERNATIONAL EDITION

LONDON AND PARIS MARKETS FLOODED WITH LOOTED IRANIAN ANTIQUITIES

report on january 2001 discovery
BY EDEK OSSER^[1]

JIROFT, IRAN. In January 2001 a group of Iranians from Jiroft in the southwest province of Kerman stumbled upon an ancient tomb. Inside they found hoards of objects decorated with highly distinctive engravings of animals, mythological figures, and architectural motifs.

They did not realise it at the time, but they had just made one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries in recent years.

A few weeks after the discovery, officials from Iran's Ministry of Culture, vastly outnumbered by the local people, watched hopelessly as thousands systematically dug up the area. The locals set up a highly organised impromptu system to manage the looting: each family was allocated an equal plot of six-metres to dig.

This organised pillaging continued for an entire year. Dozens of tombs were discovered, some containing up to 60 objects, and thousands of ancient objects were removed.

[1] We wish to thank the *Art Newspaper*, International Edition, for its kind permission to use this excerpt.

WAR ON TERROR CLAIMS UNINTENDED VICTIMS

FEBRUARY 2003

The war on terror is wreaking havoc on archaeology across the Middle East, threatening the oldest sites with destruction from both bombs and looters. Across the world, archaeologists of all faiths and political ideologies are banding together to protect the most valuable sites.

“These sites contain historical artifacts dating back 5,500 years,” says one expert, who was struggling to guard an ancient grave that looters had already damaged. As he watched, a child sifted through a pile of rubbish, looking for smaller finds missed by the professional looters.

The war on terror may be making the world a safer place, but it is destroying the written record of civilization. What bombs do not destroy, greed does. Governments focused on eliminating terrorists and protecting civilians do not have the additional resources to send armed guards to protect known archaeological digs. When a bomb hits an area and a relic is discovered in the rubble, looters arrive within hours to strip the site clean, often selling their finds on Internet auctions.

One archaeologist has spent the last six months cataloging license plate numbers instead of relics. He hopes to one day bring justice to his country, and the antiquities back.

“Cars and rented trucks hover around these sites like vultures,” he says, “even backing up right into the middle of the dig and loading up.”

Archaeologists watch helplessly as these “artifact mercenaries,” sometimes armed with guns, saw up larger statues for easy transport, dumping gold jewelry and pottery alike into the beds of the trucks before speeding away.

And people of all income levels are getting involved. To families ravaged by war, one artifact can put food on the table for months. For diplomats, a gift to a contributor’s private art collection can assure political support and continued financial contributions.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)
December 29, 2003

On December 26, 2003, at 5:27 a.m. local time, an earthquake struck Kerman Province in southeastern Iran. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the earthquake measured 6.6 on the Richter scale and had a depth of 10 km. The epicenter was near the city of Bam, 180 km southeast of the provincial capital of Kerman and 975 km southeast of Tehran.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reports that an estimated 100,000 to 120,000 people live in Bam and the surrounding villages, all of whom have been affected by the earthquake.

International media reports estimate that the earthquake has resulted in the deaths of 20,000 to 30,000 people.

Government of Iran (GOI) officials estimate that 25,000 to 40,000 have been injured. GOI officials report that 80 percent of houses have been destroyed in the immediate area of Bam, and an estimated 70,000 residents are homeless.

MARCH 4, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANCIENT DIARIES OF QUEEN ESTHER ACQUIRED

A twelve-year-old Iranian girl has offered for sale the publication rights to a box of antiquities, which include the sealed scrolls believed to be the personal diaries of Queen Esther, who ruled in Persia approximately 480–465 BC.

The owner will not say how she came into possession of the artifacts. She was discovered by humanitarian workers after the December earthquake, wandering in the streets with the box and a few belongings. It was understood that her family was killed by the earthquake and she was seeking to sell the box to pay for transportation to another city to live with relatives.

The diaries, which are recorded on scrolls in Aramaic, the adopted language of the ancient Persian Empire, could bring in at least \$130 million at auction.

Although it is difficult at this time to verify all details, media outlets have reported that the girl is now living outside of Iran, possibly in Paris with an unnamed relief worker, and has successfully negotiated with her former government to place the scrolls in Iran's national museum. Conditional to the museum acquiring the scrolls, they will be duplicated and published for public review. All royalties will be payable to the girl, who will also retain all future publication rights.

Prologue

Fourth Day of the Month of Av
Year 3414 after Creation

If you have opened this, you are the chosen one.

For this book has been sealed in the tomb of the ancients of Persia, never to be opened, I pray, until G-d^[1] has put His finger on a new woman of destiny, a woman who will rise up and change her nation. But we will not talk of your circumstances, and the many reasons this book may have fallen into your hands. There are no mistakes with prayer. You have indeed been called. If this sounds too strange, if you must look around your room and question whether G-d's finger has perhaps slipped, if you are not a woman with the means to change a nation, then join me on a journey. You must return with me now to a place without hope, a nation that had lost sight of G-d, a girl with nothing to offer, and no one to give it to.

I must introduce myself first as I truly am: an exiled Jew, and an orphan. My given name was Hadassah, but the oppression of exile has stripped that too from me: I am now called Esther,^[2] so that I may blend in with my captors. My people, the Hebrew nation, had been sent out of our homeland after a bitter defeat in battle. We were allowed to settle in the kingdom of Persia, but we were not allowed to truly prosper there. We blended in, our lives preserved, but our heritage and customs were forced underground. Our hearts, once set only on returning to Jerusalem, were set out to wither in the heat of the Arabian sun. My cousin Mordecai rescued me when I was orphaned and we lived in the capital city of Susa, under the reign of King Xerxes.^[3] Mordecai had a small flock of sheep that I helped tend, and we sold their fleece in the market. If times were good, we would sell a lamb for someone's celebration. It was always for others to celebrate. We merely survived. But Mordecai was kind and good, and I was not forced into dishonor like the other orphans I had once known. This is how my story begins, and I give you these details not for sympathy, but so you will know that I am a girl well acquainted with bitter reality. I am not given to the freedom in flights of fantasy. But how can I explain to you the setting of my story? It is most certainly far removed from your experience. For I suspect that in the future, women will know freedom. And freedom is not an easy thing to forget, even if only to entertain an orphan's story.

But you must forget now. I was born into a world, and into this story, where even the bravest women were faceless specters. Once married, they could venture out of their homes only with veils and escorts. No one yet had freed our souls. Passion and pleasure, like freedom, were the domain of men, and even young girls knew the wishes of their hearts would always be subject to a man's desire for wealth. A man named Pericles summed up my time so well in his famed oration: "The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you."

Our role was clear: We were to be objects of passion, to receive a man's attention mutely, and to respond only with children for the estate. Even the most powerful

woman of our time, the beautiful Queen Vashti, was powerless. That was my future as a girl and I dared not lift my eyes above its horizon. That is how I enter this story. But give me your hand and let us walk back now, past the crumbling walls of history, to this world forgotten but a time yet remembered. Let me tell you the story of a girl unspared, plunged into heartache and chaos, who would save a nation.

My name is Esther, and I will be queen.

[1] Out of respect for God, Jews write the name of God without the vowels, believing that the name of God is too holy to be written out completely by a human. God is referred to as either “G-d” or “YHVH.”

[2] The name Esther is related to the Persian name of Ishtar, a pagan goddess of the stars.

[3] Esther refers to the king by his Persian name. In the Hebrew texts of antiquity, he is also referred to as Ahasuerus.

1

Eleventh Day of Shevat
Third Year of the Reign of Xerxes
Year 3394 after Creation

Was it today that I became fully awake, or have I only now begun to dream? Today Cyrus saw me in the marketplace haggling gently with my favorite shopkeeper, Shethana, over the price of a fleece. Shethana makes the loveliest rugs—I think they are even more lovely than the ones imported from the East—and her husband is known for his skill in crafting metals of all kinds. When I turned fifteen last year, he fashioned for me a necklace with several links in the center, painted various shades of blue. He says it is an art practiced in Egypt, this inlaying of colors into metal shapes. I feel so exotic with it on and wear it almost daily. I know it is as close to adventure as Mordecai will ever allow.

But as Shethana and I haggled over the fleece, both of us smiling because she knew I would as soon give it to her, Cyrus walked by eating a flatbread he had purchased from another vendor. He grimaced when he took a bite—I think he might have gotten a very strong taste of shallot—and I laughed. He laughed back, wiping his eyes with his jacket and fanning his mouth, and then, oh then, his gaze held my eyes for a moment. Everything in my body seemed to come alive suddenly and I felt afraid, for my legs couldn't stand as straight and steady and I couldn't get my mouth to work. Shethana noticed right away and didn't conceal her grin as she glanced between Cyrus and me. I should have doubled the price of her fleece right then!

Cyrus turned to walk away, and I tried to focus again on my transaction. I could not meet Shethana's eyes now—I didn't want to be questioned about men and marriage, for everyone knows I have no dowry. To dream of winning Cyrus would be as foolish as to run my own heart straight through. I cannot dream, for it will surely crush me. And yet I can't stop this warm flood that sweeps over me when he is near.

I haven't told you the best part—when Shethana bought her fleece and left, I allowed myself to close my eyes for a moment in the heat of the day, and when I opened them again, there was a little stack of flatbread in my booth. I looked in every direction but could see no one. Taking a bite, I had to spit it out and started laughing. Cyrus was right—the vendor used many bitter shallots. The flatbread was a disaster.

2

Fifteenth Day of Nisan
Fourth Year of the Reign of Xerxes
Year 3395 after Creation

Once more I can tell you of exciting events!

King Xerxes has proclaimed a feast that will last for 180 days. It is for the royals of his provinces, every satrap and governor. Of course, no one in the market will go, as we are all common, but the feast has brought us to life nonetheless. Some of the customers in the marketplace have whispered to me that the feast is to bring support for Xerxes' coming invasion of Greece. Greece would be the final crown jewel for Persia; all else has been captured. But the Greeks are a difficult people to conquer. Persia has made shallow progress at moments, but never won her war. The Spartans are fierce warriors but even their softer cousins, the Athenians, will defend her shores to the death. Greeks are deeply superstitious, and this makes them irresistible bait for the ruthless Persians. The Greeks will not fight during religious festivals, even with an approaching army. I know Persia is hungry for more land. We are not burdened by their gods and we care not when we strike. No one here believes the Greek gods hold any sway over our fortunes. So the men say, "Let the Greeks worship as they must, and we'll take their land even as they pray inside their temples." As a Jew in exile here, I cannot bring myself to pray victory for either side. How foolish they seem to me, worshipping gods made from mud and stone, when our houses are made from no less!

But Mordecai tells me darker news—the Jewish elders suspect the feast is being given to remind us that our exile has been declared finished for years now. Yet so many of us remain, unable or unwilling to make the journey home yet! They say Xerxes and his officials want to make it clear to the kingdom of Persia that the G-d of Israel has either forgotten His people or abandoned them to Persia forever. I don't know why Xerxes would want to humiliate the Jews, however. This is a land of many gods—surely no one has paid so much notice to the one G-d the exiles still worship?

Mordecai and his officials are watching the palace carefully for a sign of what is to come. It has been mentioned more than once that perhaps my people will be taken as slaves at the end of the feast, when it has been made clear to everyone that this G-d does not reign in the hearts of the Jews here anymore. One man harassed Mordecai in the market, telling him, "If you have chosen Persia as your home, you must serve Persia as your master." I can tell Mordecai shares the fears of the elders but has not come to a conclusion. "Perhaps the feast is just a feast," he says. "Xerxes is known for his appetites." The crown has brought Xerxes unlimited access to food and women and war, and he has not restrained himself.

So for days now I have been watching caravans move through the city, weighted down with wines, pistachios, dates, and so many delicacies that it's all I can do to swallow down my salted goat meat at night. I wonder if Mordecai, too, longs for just one package to fall from the caravan, unnoticed; but then he's too busy counting his

money from the market. We've sold nearly all of our lambs to the palace for the great feast with their promises of extra money if we can deliver more tender meats before the feast is ended. The palace commissioner even spied the red roses I have growing outside our door and asked what price I would take for the blooms. I set a fair price. It is not such a burden to send a bit of my heart to the palace. Perhaps I will catch scent of my roses later and they would bring me news of the rarities I was missing!

3

Twentieth Day of Tammuz
Fifth Year of the Reign of Xerxes
Year 3395 after Creation

Today at the market I caught sight of Cyrus moving slowly through the booths with his father and mother. His mother is a good customer of mine. She has an eye for the best cuts of meat and occasionally even takes a bloom from the roses I sell. I know she must grow her own, but I think she buys from me because she knows I am an orphan. It doesn't feel like sympathy, though. It feels a little more like a certain kindness. I waited for her to come to my booth and was paralyzed by the sight of Cyrus today! I had to stand there and conduct my business, but I felt clumsy, even when I wasn't moving.

Then a strange thing happened, and I do not know what to make of it. Perhaps as I write, its meaning will become clear to me. Cyrus's father made the purchase this time, and he was all business. Cyrus held back with his mother, but I could feel him looking at me from behind her robes. I got the feeling I was being inspected by this father even as he inspected the goods in my booth. I do not know if this is a bad omen or a hint of something good to come. Cyrus's father gave me no clue. He bought his meat and left without another word. I noticed he exchanged a glance with Mordecai as Mordecai approached the booth to let me rest for lunch. But Mordecai can tell me nothing of what my future may hold. I wish he would listen more to the women's gossip in the booths of the market—for they would know what was unfolding. But Mordecai's ears are dull to the details of what's really important in the life of a girl.

I try to pray at night, facing Jerusalem with Mordecai, who whispers the sacred texts in his prayers. I do not whisper my own prayers aloud, but I wonder if our G-d hears the prayers of orphans as readily as He hears the prayers of great men like my Mordecai. It is not for me to suggest, but if I am ever given in marriage, I want it to be to a kind and gentle boy, like Cyrus. But in all I must remain silent, my prayers sent with closed eyes and an unmoving mouth.

4

First Day of Tishri
Fifth Year of the Reign of Xerxes
Year 3396 after Creation

Our new year is beginning today, while the king's great feast is almost over. He has now opened the palace gates for all men of Persia to come and enjoy the splendors and wines of his garden. The beautiful Queen Vashti has opened her palace as well—every woman in the province is welcome. Vashti is the most beautiful woman in the world. No one can dispute that about her when Xerxes has had his pick from every nation and every tribe. It is said to look upon her is to be left breathless, that to look into her eyes is to see the sapphires of all the earth, and her teeth are endless rows of perfect pearls, that no sunrise has ever matched the spreading glory of her long hair. (I want so badly to go and see her myself, to learn how she does command the imagination of so many men.)

I wish I were old enough to attend! I begged Mordecai last night over and over, but he won't hear of it. He's angry enough that the palace has set the opening date of both feasts on our day of holy rest and the palace has also consigned many Jews to work at the feast. A rumor ran through our village that the palace was using serving utensils that had been stolen from our Temple when it was first destroyed and never returned. I didn't believe that, though—who would be so bold?

"It's just once," I pleaded to Mordecai, "and we could attend to our duties in the morning before leaving."

Mordecai shook his head.

"I'll never have a chance again to go inside the queen's palace!" I protested to deaf old ears. I'm so angry at Mordecai, but all I can do is hold my tongue, my anger softened by the fact that he rescued me long ago. I know if it wasn't for me, Mordecai would have a better chance at marrying. He could save more money for the bride price he must give and more freely consider his future. I've seen him secreting money away into a jar every night after the market. For the longest time I thought it was to buy a bride, but now I suspect it is for a dowry for me. Has he seen the looks that pass between Cyrus and me at market? Has G-d answered my prayers through my uncle?

Mordecai is so good to me. But stubborn. I'll never change his mind about the queen's feast.

So tonight I lie on my bed dreaming of adventures I have been denied once again. I have to shut my ears to the sounds of the lyres, the tambourines, and the women from my village laughing as they make their way to the palace. When, Lord, when will I have adventures and attend glorious feasts? Must all my days be spent on flocks and flowers and grinding flour for our dinner? Will it be my lot to always dream and never live?^[1]

[1] [See the corresponding commentary in the appendix, "The Women of the Bible: Our Sisters, Our Selves."](#)

5

Second Day of Tishri
Fifth Year of the Reign of Xerxes
Year 3396 after Creation

Today I am sixteen, and I should not even write down the events of the day. If Mordecai ever finds this, if this book ever sees eyes beyond my own, I will burn with shame. But without a mother, I have no one to tell these things to, and so I must write them down here. A girl cannot keep such things to herself, for I feel I would burst! I do tell them to G-d in my prayers, and I am emboldened when Mordecai places his hand over mine as we pray together. I believe more and more that G-d will bend low and hear. But some prayers remain silent, and some thoughts must not be shared with my good cousin.

Cyrus, although the same age as I, celebrated his passage into manhood when he was but thirteen. The elders of the city, including Mordecai, took Cyrus to the hills where, Mordecai tells me, he hunted and killed a wild ram and the men feasted on it by a campfire, and took turns blessing Cyrus as he began his journey into manhood. I knew of these events only through Mordecai, although I envied Mordecai almost to sickness for the privilege of spending this time, and that meal, with Cyrus. My Cyrus. I can call him that now, with certainty, for we have exchanged more than looks today! Oh, let me tell you of the most marvelous day a girl has ever had!

There is no celebration for the Jewish girls in this village who pass into womanhood, although everyone knows we become women earlier than the boys become men! So today in the market, as I did every year, I had to content myself with receiving many warm hugs from the women, and a few trinkets to mark the day. My heart burned to be acknowledged like Cyrus was. Am I forever fated to be a child? Will no one accept me as the adult I surely am?

But perhaps that is what it means to be a woman, to carry these little wounds in your heart and make no mention of them. Still, it was a good day and it brought good gifts. Shethana's husband sent along a beautiful engraving with a picture of the Temple, which had been destroyed before our captivity. It was the dream of rebuilding this Temple that had kept my people alive in their hearts for so long. There had never been a greater treasure for my people than the dream of rebuilding this Temple in Jerusalem, and so while we made our beds here in this foreign land of gold and swords, we never truly lived here. I love the engraving. Others sent a few sweets and a small jar of scented water. I know it is not as dear as real perfume, but who could ever dream a shepherd girl and shopkeeper would have perfume! Scented water is fitting, and enough. So it was a lovely day. People were not so quick to haggle over my prices in the market, and a few overpaid just by a bit, with a twinkle in their eyes. I felt loved. My mother would have been pleased with the day, I thought.

As the sun began to edge away, and vendors packed and left, I was reluctant to leave, somehow. I knew Mordecai would be at home, waiting, and we would share a small meal and our best wishes for the future before going to sleep, but I felt lonely. I