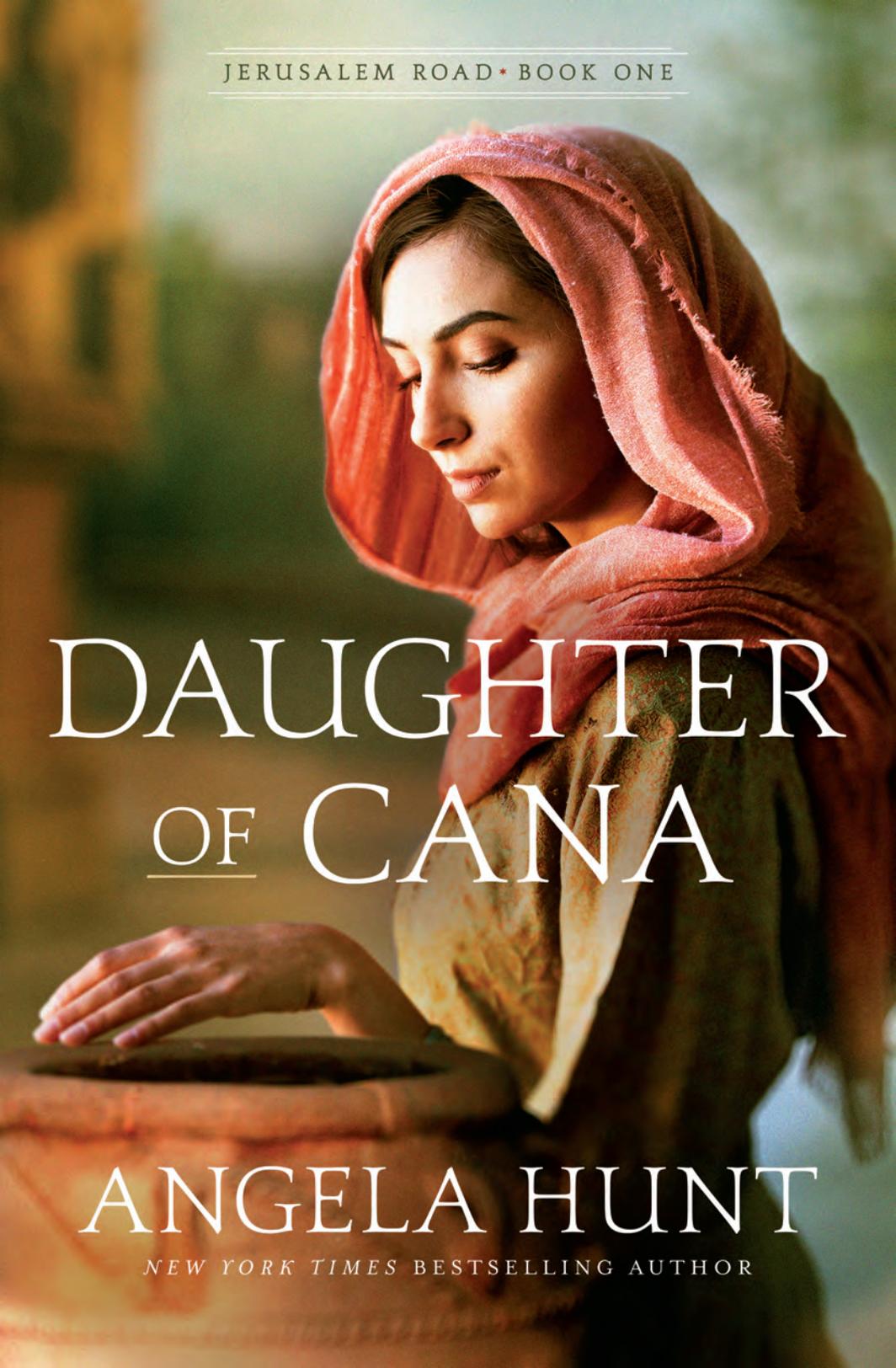

JERUSALEM ROAD • BOOK ONE

A woman with her eyes closed, wearing a red headscarf and a patterned garment, is shown in profile. She is looking down at a wooden bowl she is holding. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

DAUGHTER
OF CANA

ANGELA HUNT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JERUSALEM ROAD • BOOK ONE

DAUGHTER OF CANA

ANGELA HUNT



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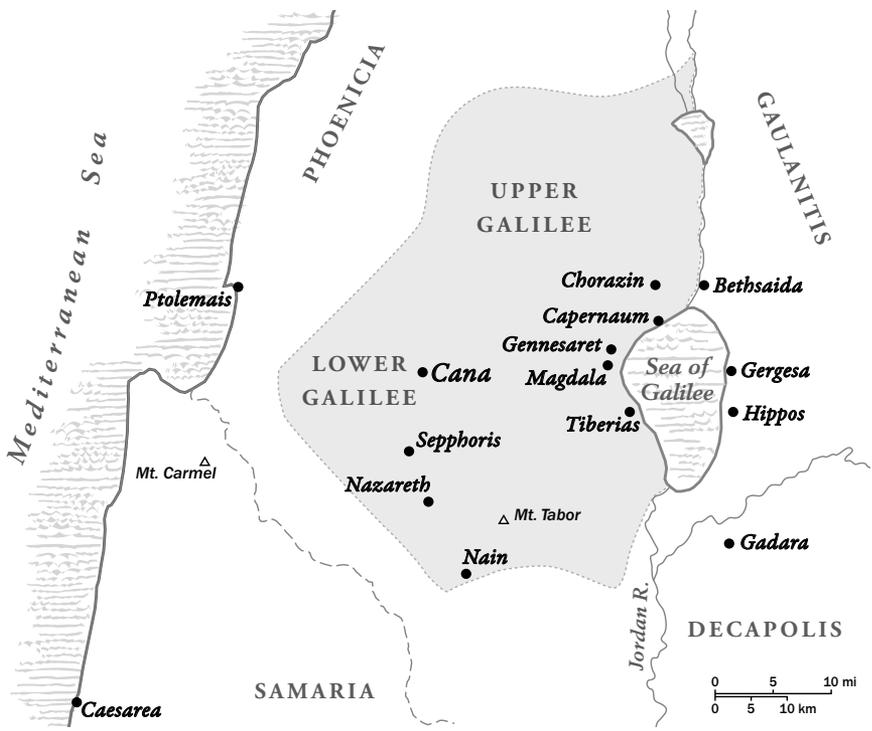
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The Old and New Testaments are filled with stories of daring men and noticeably few courageous women. This is not surprising, for the inspired writers could not recount every story of each man, woman, and child who encountered God. But even though few women's stories are recorded, they are still worthy of consideration. The JERUSALEM ROAD novels are fictional accounts of real women who met Jesus, were part of His family, or whose lives were entwined with the men who followed Him.



We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds,
Had been incorporate. So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry—seeming parted
But yet an union in partition—
Two lovely berries molded on one stem.

William Shakespeare,
A Midsummer Night's Dream

CHAPTER ONE

Tasmin

The First Day of Nisan—27 A.D.

That,” my father said, nudging me as the smiling groom led his veiled bride through the courtyard gate, “should have been you.”

I ignored Abba’s comment and struggled to keep a smile on my face. My father had promised to help me manage this feast, but chiding me about my lack of prospects was not helpful.

“The groom managed to collect quite a crowd,” I said, counting the guests as they streamed into the large courtyard of the house belonging to Etan’s father. “Forty, forty-one—where did Etan find so many?”

Aunt Dinah, who stood at my other side, waved to a woman among the new arrivals. “Cana is a small town, but I wouldn’t be surprised if our groom knows everyone in it.”

I stepped back, pressing my spine against the wall, as a pair of young boys barreled past me, hurrying toward the table where Dinah and I had spread a selection of my best honeyed breads. My brother was supposed to have set out a plate of

figs, but I hadn't seen him since we heard the marriage party approaching.

"Not only Cana," Abba said, lifting his torch to peer at another group outside the courtyard gate. "But apparently Etan knows people in other villages, as well. I do believe I see Mary, widow of Joseph the carpenter. She and her family have come from Nazareth."

"Mary." Dinah's voice softened with affection. "I have not seen her since Joseph died. What has it been now, six years? Seven?"

"Seven," Abba replied.

Sighing, I followed my father's pointing finger and spotted a woman standing at the center of a dusty company—they must have set out from Nazareth as soon as Shabbat ended. She appeared to be surrounded by everyone in her family—several adult children, in-laws, and grandchildren . . . at least four little ones, by my count. And all of them would be tired, dusty, and thirsty.

As they stopped by the tall water jars inside the courtyard, I turned to look for Thomas. "Where is my brother?" I asked, not bothering to cloak the irritation in my voice. "He was supposed to put fruit on the table."

"There." Dinah pointed toward the torchlit gate, where Thomas was joking with a group of men among the newcomers. One of the hired servants held the guests' sandals while they splashed water over their dusty feet.

"Must Thomas greet every guest?" I asked. "Is he going to help me or play the host?"

"He will help you." Abba patted my shoulder. "But he likes to mingle. Do not scold him for being hospitable."

I pressed my lips together, hearing my father's unspoken rebuke: *Unlike you, he enjoys meeting people, so let him be.*

“When he has finished being convivial”—I gave Abba a pained smile—“please remind him that we were *both* hired to work at this banquet. I will be baking every night, and now with extra mouths to feed—”

“Do not worry about your brother,” Dinah said. “I have never met a more responsible young man.”

I glanced at the table, where my sweetbreads were rapidly disappearing. If the children didn’t stop taking them, the adults would never have a chance to sample their light texture and delicious filling.

At least the children would not raid the wine barrels.

“I hope,” I muttered, “Etan’s father purchased enough wine or we will be forced to water it down.”

“Who plans a wedding feast without wine?” Dinah’s smile widened. “Now, I must go greet my friend.”

She strode toward Mary of Nazareth, who had just accepted a cloth to dry her feet. I turned to check on the bride and groom—Etan and Galya had taken their places at the head table, and Etan’s broad smile, dazzling against his tanned skin, confirmed his happiness. Galya’s slender fingers crept out from beneath her long veil to clasp Etan’s hand. She had to be pleased with her groom, because rarely did I see such obvious signs of affection at a wedding feast.

I blew out a breath and looked away. They must be in love, whatever that meant. Though Etan had taken nearly two years to build a home for his bride, he told my brother the weeks had passed like days, so strong was his love for Galya. I couldn’t help but wonder if he would have felt the same if he’d had to work the seven years Jacob invested in Rachel . . .

I crossed my arms as Thomas broke away from his friends and strolled toward me. After catching my eye, he waggled

his brow, sending a silent message I had no trouble deciphering.

“Yes,” I whispered when he reached me. “Abba has already hinted that I should be having a wedding of my own. But he doesn’t understand.”

Thomas leaned against my shoulder. “He only wants you to be happy.”

“So he says. But I *am* happy, so why can’t he leave things alone? I have a home, I have work I enjoy, and I have you, my other half. What more could I want?”

Thomas snorted. “Perhaps he wants grandchildren.”

“He can enjoy Dinah’s. I cannot get a proper Shabbat rest when her wild ones come to visit. Children should be quiet on Shabbat—no, they should be quiet *all* the time. And—” I caught my breath as the two little boys raced by again, their hands filled with the fruits of my labor—“children do not belong at weddings.”

Thomas cast me a teasing smile and did not argue. We stood in companionable silence until Thomas turned toward the guests from Nazareth.

“Is that Mary? Aunt Dinah’s friend?”

I nodded.

“And she brought—how many?”

“I counted nine additional adults. Nine more mouths to feed, plus a handful of children. After coming from Nazareth, you can be certain they’ll be famished.”

“The daughters are married, so of course there are children—”

“Are you hinting, too?”

Thomas leaned toward me, his face twisting in mock surprise. “Me, tease you? I know better. I’ve been with you since the womb.”

“Exactly.” I crossed my arms again. “Marriage must be wonderful for people who have no one else, but I fail to understand its appeal. I suppose some people love children, but I wouldn’t know what to do with a baby.”

Thomas smiled but with a distracted look, as if his attention had shifted to something more interesting.

“Brother? Are you still listening?”

He inclined his head toward the contingent from Nazareth. “I was thinking about Mary’s family—I have heard interesting rumors about the eldest son. That one.” He pointed to a man who had bent to talk to a little boy. “He is called Yeshua.”

I studied the man as he straightened, patted the boy’s head, and turned back to his brothers. He did not appear particularly interesting to me. A dusty cloak covered his shoulders, he wore his shoulder-length hair tied back with a leather strip, and he was not tall. Taller than his mother and sisters, certainly, but one of his brothers was at least a handsbreadth taller than Yeshua. Being a tall woman, I preferred men who could look me in the eye when we spoke.

The boy who had been talking to Yeshua scurried away, probably to raid another of my carefully arranged tables, and Yeshua turned to speak to his mother, a middle-aged woman whose hair had begun to gray at her temples.

In a sudden silence, Yeshua shifted and his gaze caught mine. I stiffened, momentarily embarrassed to be caught staring, and lowered my eyes. I thought he would do the same, but when I lifted my head, he was still staring, with the suggestion of a smile on his lips. He nodded, almost imperceptibly, as if we shared a secret, and then he pointedly shifted his attention to Thomas, as if he were trying to tell me something about my brother. Though Thomas was looking down, I felt a shudder ripple through his frame as Yeshua’s gaze brushed him.

The moment ended when someone from Yeshua's family called his name. When he turned and addressed the one who had spoken to him, a roar of sound rushed in to fill the dense quiet.

"What rumors, Thomas?" I asked, barely recognizing my voice as my own. "What have you heard about Mary's son?"

Thomas swallowed hard, the knot in his throat bobbing as he turned toward the group from Nazareth. "Various stories," he said. "I heard he left home several months ago and went to the wilderness to see John the Immerser. He asked John to baptize him, and at first John refused. But then he agreed, and some say that when he came up out of the water, a dove flew down and settled on Yeshua's shoulder while the heavens thundered in approval."

I wanted to know more, but just then Dinah tapped my shoulder and declared that more guests were coming toward the house, men she had never seen before.

"Did Etan invite everyone he's ever met?" I looked past the gate, where more than half a dozen torches bobbed in the darkness. "Who *are* these people?"

For the first time that day, an edge underscored my aunt's voice. "I hear they are followers of Mary's son," she said. "But I cannot imagine anyone being so thoughtless. Etan's father did not expect to feed half the people in Galilee."

"But we cannot turn them away." A host was duty-bound to welcome any guest who responded to his invitation, so anyone who entered the flower-bedecked courtyard would be welcomed, fed, and housed for the duration of the seven-day feast or as long as they wished to stay.

Perhaps, if HaShem had mercy, some of these people would grow tired of the dancing, interesting conversation, and free food and wine. Perhaps some would go home early.

But I was more likely to wake up as empress of the Roman Empire.



Darkness had draped her ebony wings over Etan's house by the time the bride and groom slipped into the bridal chamber. The smell of woodsmoke filled the air as the groom's male guests sat quietly on wooden benches near the fire, relaxing and occasionally belching. Inside the house, the women gathered in small groups to whisper stories of their own bridal chambers.

Since I had no such stories, I remained in the courtyard and focused on the work I had been hired to complete. The sweetbreads had disappeared, along with the raisin cakes and boiled eggs. I would have to bake before going to bed and boil every egg Etan's hens had laid. Tomorrow morning, Thomas could fetch more salted fish from the market, and he had promised to seek out a deer or a gazelle for roasting over the open fire.

Finally, just as the fire was dying down, the bridegroom emerged, a sheet in his hand. He held it aloft, displaying a small sprinkling of blood, and the guests erupted in joyous shouts and renewed calls for wine.

I stood back and bit my thumbnail as the servants carried fresh pitchers among the crowd, pouring drink into every up-lifted cup. I knew how much wine Etan's father had purchased, and at this rate of consumption it would not last a full week. I could order the hired servants to pour water into the wine barrels after everyone had gone to bed, but wouldn't the difference in quality be noticed?

I lifted my head as a masculine figure approached, then relaxed when the moonlight revealed my father's worn face. "You look tense, daughter." He leaned against the wall of

the house and rested his folded hands on his protruding belly. “Your hard work has been noticed and appreciated. The rabbi himself complimented your fig cakes.”

“I will have to bake tonight, probably every night, but that is not what concerns me most.” I managed a wavering smile. “I’m worried about the wine. I can always bake more cakes and add vegetables to the stew, but I do not think there’s enough wine in Cana to satisfy this crowd’s thirst.”

“Etan’s father must have underestimated the number of guests.” Abba barked a cough, then caught his breath and looked out at the courtyard, still crowded with men. “He did not expect so many from outside Cana. Joseph’s family, yes, for his widow is related to Etan’s mother, but all those men who followed her son . . .”

A crease appeared between his brows as he studied Mary’s eldest. Yeshua had pulled away from his family and sat in a circle of men I’d never seen before. Four of them wore rough garments, not proper wedding attire, yet one of them looked—

I blinked, stunned by what my father must have already noticed. “Thomas is with them?”

Abba sighed, then drew a wheezing breath. “Your brother is a man full grown; I do not command him.”

“But surely you do not want him associating with these ill-bred fellows. Look how they are dressed! And they came without an invitation.”

“Etan’s father invited Mary and her children; Yeshua invited the others. Etan was happy to welcome them.”

“He didn’t have a choice.” I shook my head. “Thomas should not be associating with these—these worthless rascals. I am going over there to pull him away. He ought to be helping me.”

Abba’s hand closed around my upper arm. “You will not

interfere. You must think of your reputation. If you ever want to marry—”

“I am not thinking about marriage. I am thinking about my twin!”

Abba looked at me with something like pity in his eyes, and his voice softened as he released my arm. “I know how much you love your brother, Tasmin. But you are a grown woman, well past the age when a girl should be wed. It is time both you and Thomas married and established homes of your own. You have been together a long time, yet it is time you pulled apart. People are beginning to think your attachment is odd.”

I turned away, my eyes burning with angry tears. Odd? I *did* love my brother, but how dare anyone accuse us of being anything but twins. We belonged to each other because we had been like two halves of the same person since the womb. He was male, I was female; he liked being around people, I liked being alone; he acted on impulse, I liked to plan; he was active, I was calm. Yet despite our differences, we could communicate without words and feel what the other felt even from a distance.

Our father did not understand our connection, though I did not expect him to. He had been one son among many. He had not shared his mother’s womb; his soul had not been entwined with another since the moment HaShem breathed life into him.

But Thomas understood me, and I him. We had endured the same life experiences, so we had been molded together. And neither of us would ever need anyone else.



The crickets had gone to bed by the time I finished cleaning the cooking area at the rear of the courtyard. The local guests

had gone home, while those who had come from a distance were sleeping anywhere they could find a place to stretch out. People loved a wedding, and though local guests split their time between the celebration and tending to their animals, children, and work, others traveled from miles away and enjoyed staying overnight, even if it meant sleeping on the floor.

Thomas, Dinah, Abba, and I were staying at our host's home because we would be working late and rising early to tend to the guests' needs. Before heading to the house, I checked the basement where the groom's father had stored the wine. He had purchased seven barrels for the seven-day feast; we emptied three of them on the first day. Only four remained, yet the feast was far from over . . .

Thomas should have spoken to Etan's father, but I had not seen him for hours.

Inside the house, I found one of the hired servants and shook her awake. "I am placing you in charge of the wine," I whispered. "At sunrise, when you fill your pitchers, make sure the pitcher is one-quarter—no, halfway filled with water. Do not let the guests know what you are doing. If we are fortunate, and if the guests are content, perhaps they will not notice that the quality of the wine has suffered."

The girl chewed her lower lip for a moment, then nodded.

"Rest well," I told her, lifting my lamp. "Tomorrow will be another busy day."

I walked to the back of the house, where Dinah had bedded down on a thick pile of blankets. She was on her back and snoring when I stretched out beside her, but she woke when I released an exhausted sigh. "Tasmin?"

"I'm here."

"Good." She rolled onto her side to face me. "You worked late. You must be tired."

“I am.”

“You should take some time to enjoy the guests. A wedding should be a celebration, even for those who have to work. After all, Galya is a friend of yours, no?”

“She is. So I will try, Aunt.” I folded my hands over my stomach and stared at the ceiling beams. My aunt probably wanted to share all the gossip she’d gathered from the other women—

“It was good to see Mary,” she said, pillowing her cheek on her hands. “I haven’t seen her in years. How strange to see her children now. The youngest was all arms and legs when I last saw him; now he is a man.”

“Hmm. Her husband was a carpenter, no?”

“A good one. Mary hopes her younger sons will continue in the trade. They have taken over Joseph’s business, but she does not think carpentry suits them. Their hearts, she says, are not in the work.”

I stifled a yawn. “Why doesn’t the older one take his father’s place?”

“Yeshua?”

“Isn’t he the eldest?”

“He has done much of the work since Joseph’s death—in fact, she says, he is the most skilled of them all, especially with carving. But Mary thinks he is destined for something else. She says HaShem has a special plan for him.”

I snorted a laugh. “He seems to have a gift for attracting strangers. We used three times as much wine as expected, thanks to the crowd who came with him. Why are so many men following in his wake? Even Thomas seemed captivated by him.”

Dinah chuckled. “His brothers aren’t captivated, I assure you. I was talking with James and Jude, and they think their brother is odd. His sisters think he’s spoiled.”

“Spoiled?”

“Anyone can see his mother favors him. Whatever he says, she does. Pheodora, the youngest girl, says Mary thinks Yeshua can do no wrong.”

My heavy eyelids scraped like sandpaper over my tired eyes. “Really.”

“He is not married,” Dinah went on. “And he’s thirty years old.”

“Hmmm.” I could not summon the energy to reply with words.

“You should be thinking about marriage,” Dinah continued. “And Thomas, too, though it always seems to take sons longer to come around to it. He will have to build a home for his bride, take over the family business . . . But if you should happen to wed one of Mary’s sons, Nazareth is not far away.”

“Aunt Dinah?”

“Yes?”

“I need to sleep. Tomorrow will be another long day.”

I heard a sigh, then felt her hand cup my cheek. “Sleep well, dear girl. We will speak again in the morning.”

I did not want to talk about marriage now or ever, so when daylight broke, I would rise before Dinah and go straight to work.