

GRATITUDE

My mother was an innkeeper. I will be an innkeeper. Sons follow the occupations of their fathers, daughters, the occupations of their mothers. Bummer for me. Not exactly thrilled about becoming an innkeeper. First, I'm stuck in this boring, old city, add to that cleaning rooms of the people who stay with us, preparing their meals, keeping them entertained. And if an innkeeper is a woman, that entertainment sometimes includes sexual favors. I dread the thought of inheriting the family business in Jericho.

I do have one advantage in this family business plight. My older sister is already an innkeeper and she wants to keep me out of the profession. Rahab is the most popular innkeeper in Jericho. She's a hard worker, provides for her family and extended family – parents, brothers and sisters. My sister is beautiful, but it's her quick wit and cleverness that capture everyone's attention. She's friends with everyone in town, including all the government officials. There are few secrets in town she doesn't know.

Our inn has three-stories and is next to the city walls. We live in it, as well as run the business. Let's just say, the wall guards are used to men secretly climbing in or out of my sister's window. She rewards the guards for never seeing anything she doesn't want them to see.

Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world. Our walls are impenetrable, and our king is powerful. Our gods are revered, but everyone knows they're useless. All of which makes me hate the city more. Nothing ever changes, nothing will ever change...my future, well, bleak isn't even close. My parents say we should be grateful for our good business, but is it good? I hate my hopeless life.

My sister is in a constant dilemma: She needs my help, but she doesn't want her patrons to notice me. She makes me look as ugly as possible, but hard to hide. I stay quiet and out of the way, as much as I can, but it's pretty easy to know everything that is happening in our inn.

Our entire city is on edge. The tension is in every face. There's a rumor: a large tribe of people is headed our way. Originally from Egypt. And, on their way here has crushed two

powerful kings on the other side of the Jordan River. Completely destroyed their cities, even the walled cities...according to rumor. The rumor claims it's their powerful God who lives with them and makes them invincible. They plan to cross the Jordan and attack my city and the rest of the country. Just rumors.

Nothing will ever change in Jericho. Then, strange events start happening. Two foreigners come to our inn. Rahab spends an extraordinary amount of time with them. Soldiers come pounding at the door, she hides the strangers. Under a pile of flax on the roof. That night she lets them out of her window on the city walls. And they disappear into the countryside.

She tells me nothing. I learn the king of Jericho is searching desperately for two men. The foreigners! He shuts the city gates, and the city starts preparing for war. We gather food and water, preparing for a long siege. My sister hangs a red cord out of her window, a super long red cord. The guards and people are used to seeing strange things at our house. Nobody pays attention.

Rumors invade the city. Hebrews, that's what the threatening foreigners go by. Their God, he recently struck them with a plague just because they had an orgy with the local Moabite women. The Jordan stopped flowing at flood stage so they could cross it. Then they paused there for days to enact a religious ritual known as circumcision. It's very crude.

Rumors become reality. We see the dust clouds move closer to Jericho. We expect a brutal attack, but that doesn't happen. Every day, a parade of men, in costumes, march around the city, and then march right back to their camp. On day seven, they march around the walls seven times, and then start shouting.

Chaos! Complete chaos! A roar like I've never heard. Their god has done it again. The ancient walls of Jericho vibrating, crumbling, falling. Dust everywhere, you can't see, you can barely hear. Screams...screams of fear is all I hear. They raise in pitch and volume as the killing starts. I'm gonna die.

Someone grabs my hand. Rahab. A group of strange soldiers surrounds my small family. They lead us over the rubble and out of Jericho. I recognize two of the soldiers, they were at our inn. Our former inn. Now destroyed, except for one section with the red cord hanging from my sister's window.

They take us to the huge camp of the invaders. We aren't allowed to enter the camp, they've prepared a tent outside of the camp for us. Instead of killing us, they provide for

us?! I know! Rahab saved the lives of the two men, when they spied on Jericho.¹ They were spies! They consider my sister as righteous because of her help. The fact that she is an innkeeper is unimportant to them.

We aren't strangers very long. Salmon ben Nashon comes to court my sister according to the customs of the Hebrews. In a few months they are married, and less than a year later, I have a little nephew, Boaz! He's so cute.

Rahab and my mom come to my small room one night. I am happier than I've ever been, and they are thrilled about it. They wonder is it because we lead a more adventurous life? Or that I'm safe? Or because I won't have to be an innkeeper?

I am thankful for all of those things, but that isn't all of it. I tell them that I am overwhelmingly grateful to have traded the false gods of Jericho for the God of the Hebrews who is more powerful, and...he is a God who loves me. That's what the God of the Hebrews is like! A God who forgives me, and wants me to be his child. A powerful God who protects me, I've already experienced that. My future, brighter than ever. Hope, when there never was any before.

Boaz? My nephew...He grows up and marries a foreign woman, Ruth. They have a baby named Jesse. I will be an old woman before Jesse has the last of his eight sons, David. King David, the ancestor of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

¹ James 2:25