

AMAZON QUICK PROMO

For *JERUSALEM MAIDEN* by Talia Carner

In 2009, I entered an earlier draft of *Jerusalem Maiden* in Amazon's Breakthrough Novel Award competition. *Jerusalem Maiden* was the fourth novel I had written, but the first to have touched "what I know." Not only is Jerusalem one of my favorite cities, but the character of Esther Kaminsky, my protagonist, was inspired by my own beloved grandmother.

My grandmother was an astonishingly gifted artist who confined her talent to knitting, crocheting, sewing and embroidering—the only artistic expressions permitted women of her time. In the "what if" fashion of fiction writing, I asked myself what could happen to a feisty, artistic girl who, propelled by her untapped artistic genius, tried to break away? What if her talent compelled her to break God's Second Commandment, "Thou shall not make any graven image?"

Imagining my grandmother's alternate life was not new to me. At sixteen, first walking the cobblestoned alleys of Montmartre in Paris, I took in the fabulous street artists working their craft to the tunes of French folk songs pouring from surrounding cafés and I envisioned my grandmother as a young Bohemian living there. She belonged there. My grandmother should never have married, had children, or become my grandmother. Instead, she should have been set free in Paris to explore her true artistic talent.

But what would it take for my "what if" character, born a hundred years ago into an ultra-Orthodox religious society in the Holy Land, to rebel against the restrictions, dictates, and prohibitions so deeply ingrained in her mind and heart? Could she permit her passions to defy God and risk His wrath?

The historical facts of the Ottoman Empire's rule of the Holy Land are well documented: by the early 20th century, when my book is set, the government was corrupt and decaying. Also, much of my family's ten-generation history in Jerusalem is documented through books and names on street signs. But most historians were ignorant of women's lives of that era. To support my grandmother's stories, I read hand-written journals and letters at a specialized Jerusalem library, consulted historians, and used rare maps to walk the old neighborhoods. Interviewing aging women about the nuances of their mothers' lives, I found that Jewish women in the early 1900s believed that Jerusalem's pestilence, hunger, and burying half their babies were facts of life—or their due suffering meant to hasten the Messiah's arrival. Through these oral histories and primary documents, I constructed Esther, the young woman whose yearnings for individuality and freedom forever clashed with her faith.

Jerusalem Maiden reached the semi-finals in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, with over eighty rave reviews. Now, two years later, Esther's fascinating journey is yours to share.

Add to the excitement of this journey by following Esther's footsteps on my website and catch one of my speaking events.