

**THE HOLY CITY,
JERUSALEM II**

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The Holy City, Jerusalem II by Selma Lagerlöf & Velma Swanston Howard

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SELMA LAGERLÖF & VELMA SWANSTON HOWARD

THE HOLY CITY, JERUSALEM II

THE HOLY CITY

JERUSALEM II

FROM THE SWEDISH OF
SELMA LAGERLÖF

TRANSLATED BY
VELMA SWANSTON HOWARD



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THE HOLY ROCK AND THE HOLY
SEPULCHRE

THE HOLY CITY

THE HOLY ROCK AND THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

IT WAS a hot August in Palestine. Every day the sun beat down upon the heads of the people. There was not a cloud on the sky and no rain had fallen since April. Though not any hotter than it is wont to be at this season, it was almost unbearable. How one would ever be able to endure such heat one hardly knew, or where one could go to escape it.

Jaffa was perhaps the best refuge—not in the city itself, with its buildings crowded closely together on a steep hill, and where a sickening stench arose from the filthy streets and the large soap factories; but the town lay close by the sea, which always brought some freshening breeze. And one could be fairly comfortable in the environs, as Jaffa was surrounded by hundreds of orange groves, where the fruit hung fresh and cool, protected from the blasting sunlight by its stiff and glossy dark-green foliage.

But how insufferably hot it was even in Jaffa! The big leaves of the tall, resinous shrubs were dry and shriveled and the hardy pelargoniums, no longer able to flower, lay drooping on mounds and in hollows—almost buried beneath billows of dust. Seeing the red blossoms of the cactus hedges, one would imagine it was all the heat

which their thick stems had absorbed through the summer that had suddenly broken out in great flames. One realized how hot it must be, when seeing the children running along the beach, to get down to the sea, lift their feet high, as though they were stepping upon burning coals.

If one could not stand it in Jaffa, then where was one to go? Anyhow, it was better here than on the wide plain of Sharon, which lay beyond the town, between the sea and the mountains. To be sure, there were people still staying in the small towns and villages that dotted the plain, though it was difficult to understand how they could survive the heat and drouth. But they rarely ventured outside their windowless dwellings and never left the towns, where the houses and a few solitary trees yielded them some little protection against the sun. On the open plain one could no more have found a green blade of grass than a human being. All the beautiful red anemones and poppies of the spring, all the little pinks and daisies that had covered the ground as with a thick red-and-white carpet, were gone; and the crops of wheat, rye and durra grown in the fields near the towns, had already been harvested, and the harvesters, with their oxen and asses, their songs and dances, had returned to their village homes. All that remained of the glories of spring were the tall withered stalks that rose above the sun-baked soil—and that had once borne beautiful, fragrant lilies.

A good many persons maintained that one could best stand the summers in Jerusalem. The town was cer-

tainly cramped and over-populated, but as it lay at the highest point of the long range of mountains extending across the whole of Palestine, no breath of wind could come from any direction without its freshness reaching the Holy City. But, notwithstanding these blessed winds and the light mountain air, there was more than enough of summer heat even in Jerusalem. People slept at night on the roofs of their houses, and remained indoors during the day. They had to drink ill-smelling water, which had gathered in the subterranean cisterns during the winter rains; and they were anxious lest that even that might give out. The least puff of wind raised thick clouds of lime-dust, and when one walked along the white roads outside the city one's feet sank deep into the soft fine soil. But worst of all, the heat prevented people from sleeping. For lack of sleep the inhabitants of Jerusalem were by day depressed and irritable, and at night had terrifying visions and were tormented by haunting fears.

On one of these hot nights an American woman, who had been living in Jerusalem for some years, lay tossing on her bed, unable to rest. She moved her bed from the room onto the balcony outside her window and applied a cold compress to her aching head; but nothing afforded her any relief. She lived about five minutes' walk from the Damascus gate, in a palatial house that stood quite by itself in a lonely spot. Hence one would have thought that out there the air would be fresh and pure, but that night it seemed as if all the sultriness of the city

had centred about the house. There was a little wind, but it came from the desert, and was hot and stinging, as if filled with invisible sand-grains. To add to the discomforts of the night, a lot of street dogs roving outside the city walls rent the air with their loud yelps.

The American woman, having lain awake for hours, became prey to despondency. In her effort to conquer her depression she reminded herself that, since coming to Jerusalem, led by a divine revelation, she had been singularly blessed; she had founded a colony, and had overcome persecutions and hardships untold; but now she could find no comfort even in these thoughts.

She lay imagining that her faithful followers would be murdered, that her enemies would set fire to the house, that Jerusalem was sending all its fanatics against her, and she would be crushed by the blind hatred and bigotry nurtured within its walls.

She tried to regain her usual serene confidence. Why should she despair now, she asked herself, just when her cause was progressing so well, when the Gordon Colony had been strengthened by the addition of some fifty sturdy, capable Swedes, who had come over from America, and when still more of these good, dependable people were coming from Sweden. In reality her mission had never appeared so promising as at that time.

At last, to escape from her morbid fears, she got up, threw around her a long voluminous cloak, and went out in the direction of Jerusalem. Turning from the road, she climbed a steep little hill, from the top of which could