



Daughters of Jerusalem

Galya Gerstman

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Galya Gerstman's novel *Daughters of Jerusalem* follows three generations of Jewish women in early twentieth-century Palestine.

In 1900 in Serbia, Lili and her husband, Joseph, struggle to have a child; Lili lost seventeen babies soon after giving birth. When she becomes pregnant again, Lili consults both a professor of medicine and the local Kabbalah wise mothers. Meanwhile, Joseph prays at the synagogue and promises God that if the next baby survives, he will move his family to Palestine.

Three years later, Lili, Joseph, and their daughter, Mercada, make the arduous journey to the Middle East. In Jerusalem, they find a multicultural, bustling, and revered walled city. There, Lili begins to work as a midwife, aiding fellow Jews and her Muslim and Christian neighbors.

When Lili and Joseph die from cholera, their daughter is orphaned. Though Mercada is intelligent, she has limited options. She marries and raises a family amid intense poverty due to her husband's poor business skills. Still, Mercada later manages to become a legal intermediary, using her sharp mind and verbal skills to assist others in her community.

As the century progresses, Jerusalem experiences increasingly violent conflicts between Jews and Arabs. The book's rich historical backdrop spans from Palestine's Ottoman rule through World War I and the British Mandate. It also covers the 1948 declaration of the State of Israel. Peopled with a diverse range of characters, it captures the teeming thrum of Jerusalem, along with the cultural contrasts between Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and Mizrahi Jews. At the novel's core are Lili, Mercada, and Alegra, resourceful and enduring women who share a tenacity of spirit.

Told with engrossing complexity, the family saga *Daughters of Jerusalem* is set amid a land of entrenched and continuing conflict.

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