

WOMAN ON THE WALL by Robin Rivers

EXCERPT

AESMEH
MAY 2, 1519
AMBOISE, FRANCE

Dear One,

How awkward this must be to have a dead woman about to declare the direction of your life. It is unclear to me, even at this crucial moment, how I should address you. Alas, as time can no longer keep us apart, let us dispense with being strangers and begin.

I am the Sibyl of Amboise.

I died here.

You have arrived in this tiny commune because of a five-hundred-year-old pact to find you and bring you home.

As I write these words, I wonder what you know of my kind. Do you know the names Hypatia and Lubna? Does history speak of Shushandukht and Shajar al-Durr? Or, are the Sibyls little more than mythological prophetesses painted upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? In truth, we are ancient, once powerful, and nearly vanished.

Born of the Great Mother's very womb, each Sibyl's sight gave men a glimpse of what might come. We predicted wars, warned against the rise of tyrants, shed light upon the fates of many. In the great capitals of Badari, Olmec, Xi, Khemet, the Jiroft, even the wilds of Scythia, we served humanity for more than eleven thousand years. And, then . . .

What do you know, Dear One? It pains me. What kind of world did my failures leave you? In the glimmers of your time, I saw only fire and death. Without the Sibyl, men know not the cost of their acts. Power is a seductive demon. Have I left you with the tyrants?

I must assume the world is well enough that Sister Maurine stands at your side in fulfillment of her vow. My regret is not being there beside you as well.

You are the hope of the Sibylline. I once was that hope, the first to complete training and enter the temple in more than one thousand years. Such care was taken to protect me. However, a malicious enemy lived amongst us. By the time I knew, my throat was nearly slit. It lays upon you now to do what I never fully could—to rise and serve the world.

Yes, Dear One, your coming has been foretold for five centuries. In those fifty decades, such knowledge has hung in the halls of the men who thought us eradicated. They celebrated that sublime smile, all without the fortune of knowing whom they kept safe. You are the oracle they could never burn, lying in state until this very moment.

Listen, Dear One.

Listen without fear.

Your life is an amalgamation of so many others. As you gain the sight, Amboise will return our memories to you. You shall reclaim them as your own. You may feel as if you have gone mad. Know that you are coming alive. This is where your service begins.

In the moments to come, others will attempt to strip your sovereignty. Such war is inevitable. You must prepare for it. Train. Fight as a warrior. Remain devoted to your purpose alone. Do not concede.

Then, call the Sibylline to your side. Step beyond the seven bridges of paradise and into hell in the forest beyond Gaillard. There, in the temple of the Sibylline, you shall rise and take my place at Amboise. That you might watch over humankind in beauty and justice as the Great Mothers before you intended.

Eternally in your service,

Aesmeh de la Rose

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