



# BATHSHEBA

## RELUCTANT BEAUTY

A DANGEROUS BEAUTY  
NOVEL

ANGELA  
HUNT

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Angela Hunt, *Bathsheba*

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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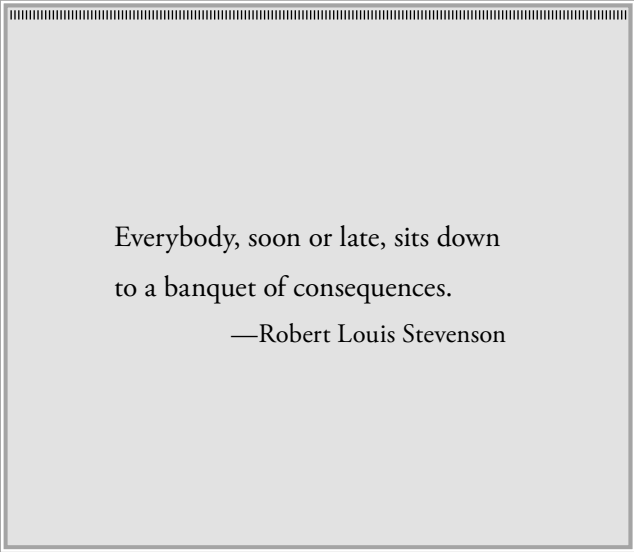
Angela Hunt Presents  
The DANGEROUS BEAUTY Series

“The Hebrew text has two words that are typically used to describe personal appearance. One, *yapeh*, is rather mild and means ‘good looking.’ The other, *tob*, when applied to women’s looks, conveys sensual appeal. This woman is so beautiful that she arouses the desire of men who see her.”

—Sue Poorman Richards and Larry Richards,  
authors of *Every Woman in the Bible*

Beauty does not always benefit the woman who possesses it. On occasion it betrays her, and at other times it endangers her, even to the point of death.

These novels—*Esther*, *Bathsheba*, and the upcoming *Delilah*—are the stories of three *tob* women.



Everybody, soon or late, sits down  
to a banquet of consequences.

—Robert Louis Stevenson



CHAPTER ONE  
BATHSHEBA

**SPRING, 996 BC**

THE FIRST TIME I SAW KING DAVID, I was sixteen and he was behaving like a man possessed. The procession carrying the holy Ark of the Covenant was moving slowly down the street where we lived, and the pageantry of the parade mesmerized me. Scores of musicians preceded the Ark—trumpeters, harpists, men who played the lyre, and singers with fine voices—and dozens of somber priests walked alongside them, their faces a study in reverence and sobriety.

Then I caught the glimmer of sunlight on a cherubim's golden wing. I clutched my father's arm and wondered if I should hide my face from such a sacred sight, but before I could ask, a rising cloud of dust caught my attention. Behind the two priests who guarded the ark, between the Levites who were blowing shofars, I spotted an auburn-haired, bearded man who leapt and spun and whirled

in reckless abandon. He wore the linen ephod and robe worn by the priests of Israel, but as the day was warm and the sun hot, he stopped spinning long enough to shrug off the outer robe and toss it to one of the guards. Then, clad only in the light linen shift, he continued to leap and twist, all the while grinning like a man who had been caught up in a holy rapture.

I glanced at my father, certain that I would see him frowning. In a moment he would call out a rebuke to the guards; he would command one of his friends to haul the madman away.

Instead, my father smiled, and in his eyes I saw the same look of fond indulgence with which he regarded me when I had done something foolish.

I tugged on his sleeve. “Father, who is that man?”

Reluctantly, he tore his gaze away from the energetic dancer. “Did you say something, daughter?”

“That man—who is he?”

His smile broadened. “That, Bathsheba, is David, the king of all Israel.”

“Behaving most inappropriately,” my grandfather grumbled.

“If you knew him better, you would not criticize him.” Father elbowed Grandfather and grinned. “That free spirit you see serves us well in battle, for the man is fearless and Adonai is with him. There’s no other way to explain how he always manages to elude his enemies.”

Grandfather did not respond, but pressed his lips together and crossed his arms in stony disapproval.

I stared at the leaping king. I had heard many stories about the youngest son of Jesse, but I had never been so close to him. To think that those sweaty hands killed a Philistine giant, that tongue devised praises to Adonai, that bushy head received the holy oil of anointing from HaShem’s prophet, Samuel . . .

I watched, fascinated, as women from both sides of the street broke blossoms from their shrubs and threw them at the dancing



king's feet. I did not know much about kings in those days, but even I was shocked to see the irreverent interest the women displayed.

"Is—is that quite proper?" I asked, feeling ill at ease. "Won't the king be offended by their behavior?"

My father chuckled, then slipped his arm around my shoulders and guided me back into the house. "David is a man after God's own heart," he said simply. "He lights up every room he enters; he elicits love from nearly everyone he meets. Do not judge him harshly, Bathsheba, for one day you may meet him again. Then you will love him, too."

I did not argue with my father, but something in me doubted I could ever love such a man as that.



According to family history, when my parents presented me to Samuel at the time of my mother's purification, the *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* touched the ordinarily coherent prophet in such a way that the torrent of words from his lips resembled nothing so much as a stream of gibberish. Though my parents strained to understand the prophet's words, they caught only a few. My father recalled hearing "mother to a great man" and "affect the future of Isra'el." My mother, on the other hand, caught only two words: "*tob* woman," a phrase that pleased her very much.

At only eighty days old, I retained no memory of my encounter with the prophet, but in the years ahead I came to understand that a river of foretellings and curses had carved out the events of my life, a torrent of words with the power to rip me from people I loved and settle me on unexpected shores.

Because the prophet Samuel declared that I would be mother to a great man, my father stressed my duty to marry well and provide my husband with sons. Because my mother heard that I

would be not merely *yapeh*, pleasant-looking, but *tob*, highly desirable, even in my childhood she urged me to keep my nails clean and my hair smooth. Because I would be blessed with the gift of beauty, she often reminded me, any man Father chose would be blessed to marry me.

I was an obedient daughter who wished to please my parents and Adonai, so I wanted nothing more than to marry a good man and have as many children as the Lord allowed. The most important duty of any woman, my father intoned nearly every night, was to accept a husband and bear sons and daughters. Once the children were weaned, my husband would teach my sons a trade and I would teach my daughters how to be dutiful wives. Together my husband and I would teach our children to reverence Adonai, King of the Universe, and the king of Israel, whom God had anointed through His prophet Samuel.

A constant theme echoed through every lesson my parents taught: I was special because I had been chosen to bear a son who would greatly influence Israel.

HaShem had every right to exercise His sovereign will through choice. He had chosen Aaron and his descendants to be His holy priests. He had chosen the Levites to be His special servants. He chose Saul to be our king; then, after Saul displeased the Lord, HaShem chose David, son of Jesse, to reign over us.

When the spring of my eighteenth year arrived, on a day not long after Passover, my father announced that I was about to commence the journey Samuel had foretold. For the past year I had been betrothed to Uriah, a soldier in the royal corps known as “the Thirty.” The marriage document had been signed, the dowry paid, my future home made ready. All that remained was for the bridegroom to appear at my father’s house and escort me to the home we’d share for the rest of our lives together.

When the agreed-upon day arrived, I was more than ready to



marry the broad-shouldered warrior who'd caught my eye during a harvest festival. I knew I was unusually blessed, because the brave warrior had earned my father's approval, as well.

"Amaris!" About to panic, I turned to the corner, where my ten-year-old sister sat on a soft pillow and strummed her harp. "Do you remember where I put my veil?"

She scrunched her nose, then pointed to the basket beneath the window. "Elisheba had it. She embroidered it for you."

My alarm melted into appreciation as I pulled the rectangle of blue fabric from the basket. Elisheba, the loyal servant who had been Amaris's wet nurse after our mother's death, had embroidered tiny gold blossoms along the rectangle's edge—a lovely touch and quite fitting for a wedding.

I ran my fingertips over the tiny stitches. "It's beautiful."

"I'm glad you like it." Elisheba's throaty voice caught me by surprise. I turned to find her standing behind me, tears glistening in her eyes. "Child, I cannot believe you are old enough to have a family of your own."

"More than old enough." Smiling, I pressed a kiss to her cheek, then pulled back to look into her dark eyes. "How old were you when you married?"

She sighed the way she always did when we asked about the life she'd led before coming to us. "Fifteen."

"See? I feel positively ancient in comparison."

Elisheba shrugged. "I was ready to be married almost from the moment I was born. But you are special, child. Your father did not want to rush. After all, he had a prophecy to keep in mind."

I resisted the youthful impulse to roll my eyes, for Samuel's oft-repeated foretelling seemed a world away from the excited flutterings in my chest. "Why should an old prophecy worry him? If Samuel was a true prophet of Adonai, nothing could nullify his words. Adonai is not a man that He could change His mind—"

“Hush, I’m not going to argue with you today. Are your nails clean?”

I smiled at the familiar question. “They are.”

“Your hair—did you rinse it with the scented water I mixed for you?”

“I did.” I caught a handful of hair and brought it to my nose, inhaling the mingled aromas of flowers and herbs. “I did everything you told me.”

She stood in front of me, her keen gaze traveling from my new sandals to my emerald-green tunic. She studied my face, her expression still sharp and assessing, and then our eyes connected and affection softened her countenance. “A *tob* woman,” she whispered. “That you are, my dear. Uriah will be the envy of every man in Jerusalem today.”

I looked away as an unwelcome warmth crept up my cheeks. “I think I will be the envy of every woman. I have seen them watching Uriah when he walks with me. Even the grandmothers smile at him.”

“Silly fools.” Elisheba tucked a stray strand of hair behind my ear. “I wonder how you will like being a soldier’s wife. You will spend many days alone.”

“But not for at least a year.” I smiled again, confident in my happiness. “Uriah cannot go to war in our first year of marriage, and a year feels like forever. I have waited a year for this day, and I thought it would never come.”

“But it did, child. And when you are my age, you will look back at your days as a girl and wonder how the time could pass so quickly.”

“Bathsheba?” My father’s rough baritone stilled our conversation. Elisheba stepped aside so I could see him in the doorway—tall, oiled, and dressed in his best tunic and cloak. “Are you ready, daughter? I hear the sound of approaching revelers.”

“Ready and eager, Father.” I pulled the embroidered scarf over my hair, then dropped a sheer fabric square over my face. I would

go to my groom veiled like Leah and Rachel, but this groom would know who waited beneath the sheer fabric.

I turned to face him, and for a long moment my father stood as though he were rooted to the floor. Without being told, I knew he was remembering the past. He might have been reliving the moment he first glimpsed my mother as his bride, or perhaps he was remembering the day Samuel placed his hand on my head and uttered a prophecy instead of a blessing.

“Daughter . . .” Father’s voice clotted with emotion. “You are more beautiful than ever.”

I whispered my thanks, but he had already begun to stride across the room. “Climb aboard, little monkey,” he told Amaris, kneeling beside my younger sister. “Today you shall sit at your new brother’s table and eat as much as you want.”

Though Amaris could walk with a crutch, we traveled faster when she rode on Father’s broad back. She threw her arms around his neck. He stood and waited while Elisheba playfully tucked my sister’s thin legs into the spaces beneath his arms. Once Amaris was securely aboard, Father moved to the door and opened it to a flood of noise—laughter and clapping and rattling tambourines. Someone blew a trumpet, and my new husband’s ruddy face appeared in the doorway.

“Bathsheba.” His eyes moved into mine, sparing not a glance for the household furnishings or my father or even for the veil that stood between us. His gaze filled an emptiness within me, the space that yearned for a good man who would love me and give me the child who would fulfill my destiny. Surely Adonai had created me for a man like Uriah.

My heart sang with delight as I stepped forward and slid my hand into his. He gave me a look of unmistakable gratitude, then together we moved through the courtyard on our way to the place he had prepared—a lovely stone house on the heights of Jerusalem, a dwelling that lay in the shadow of the king’s grand palace.