

A close-up photograph of a vibrant pink rose with green leaves, resting on a white, ruffled fabric. A string of pearls is draped across the fabric in front of the rose. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light pink.

A WOMAN CALLED

Esther

Once upon a time there was a young girl called Esther. She was very beautiful and lived in Persia. She was a foreigner in this country, although she was probably born there. Her parents were dead and her uncle raised her. Her family came originally from Jerusalem. They were Jews.

Esther had many dreams: a nice husband, a family, children, a pretty home . . .

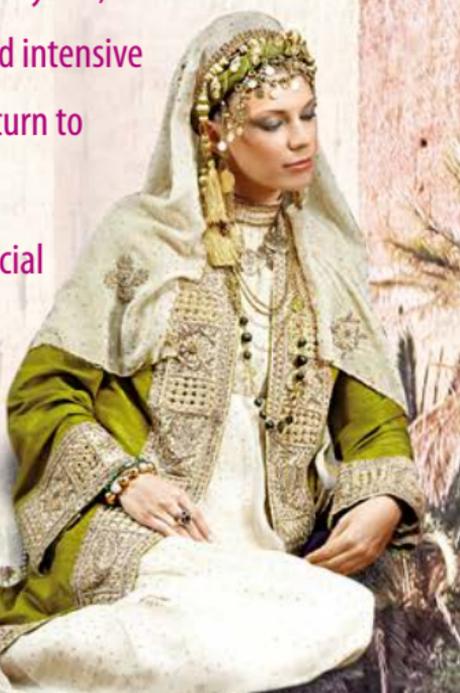
Suddenly her life changed. Xerxes, the mighty king of Persia, was unhappy with his queen, dismissed her and was looking for another young

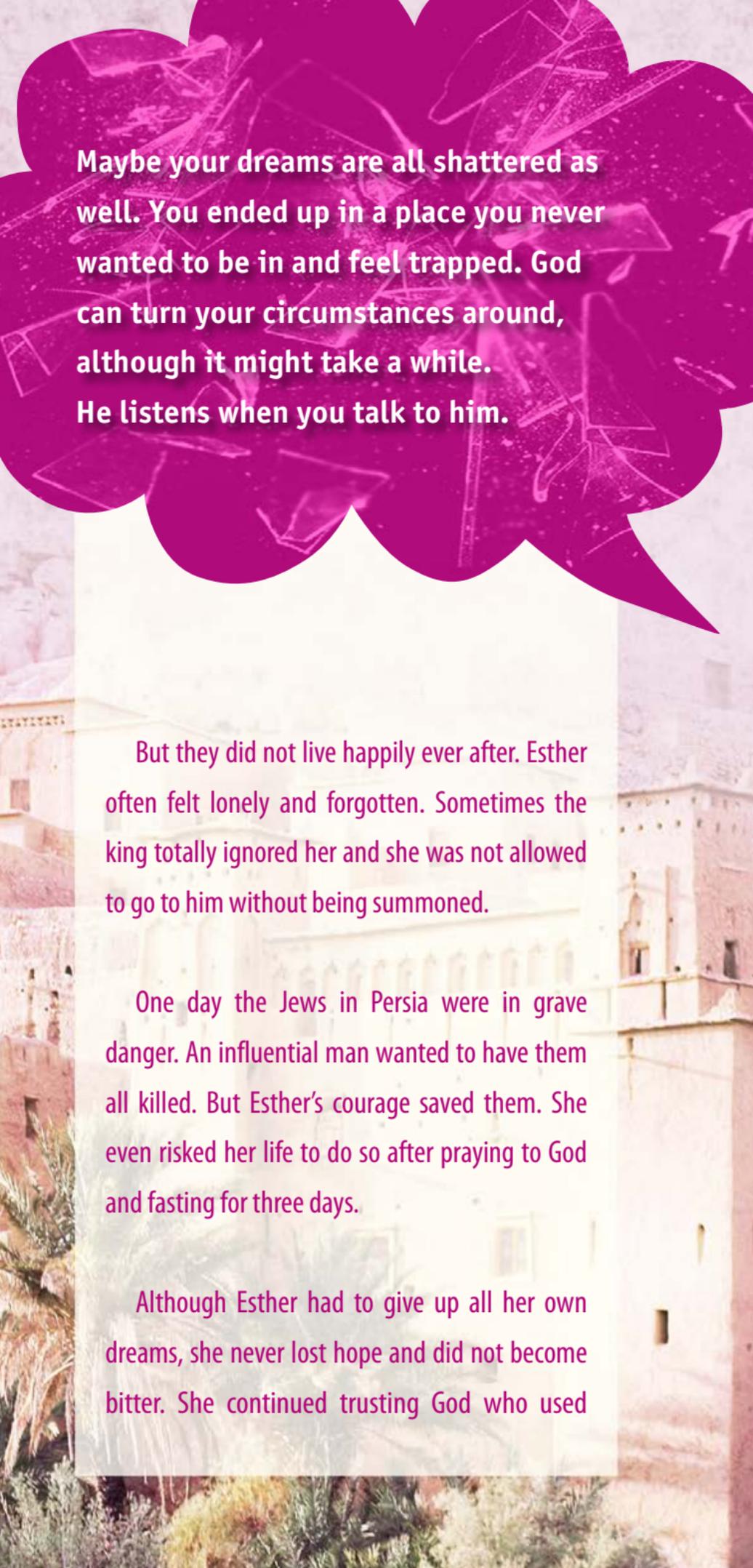


girl to take her place. He gave the order that every pretty maiden in his kingdom was to be brought to his harem and have 12 months of selected food and beauty treatments.

Poor Esther, she had to leave everything and everybody she loved behind, and was brought to the city of Susa, to the king's palace. There she was prepared for one purpose only, to be presented to the king who would look at her beauty and sleep with her. Every night he took another girl until he found one who really pleased him. This one would become his new queen. The rejected young women were brought to the part of the palace where the concubines of the king lived. They could never leave this place again.

After 12 months of beauty oils, perfumes, special food and intensive treatment it was Esther's turn to be brought to the royal chambers. She was so special that the king fell in love with her immediately and married her.



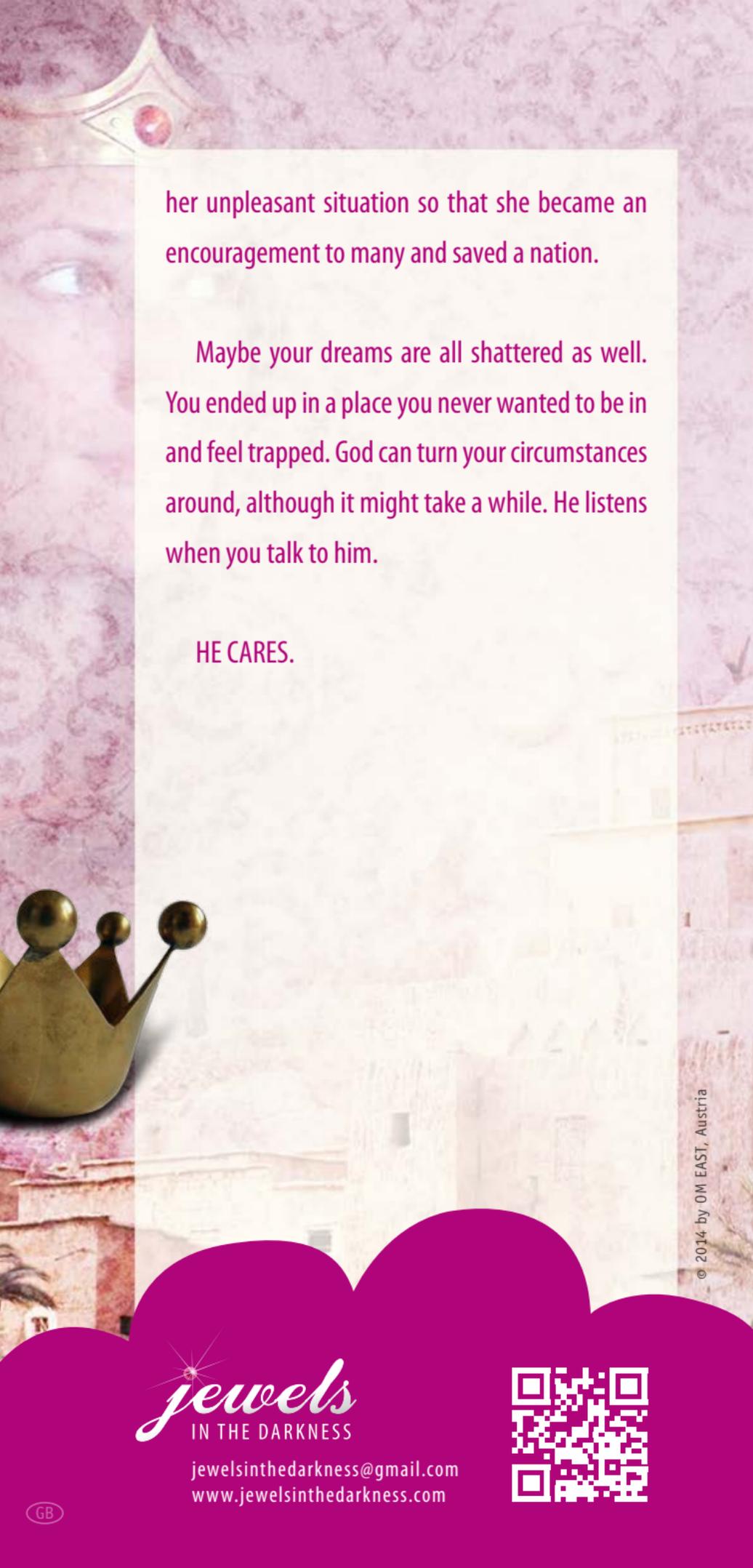


Maybe your dreams are all shattered as well. You ended up in a place you never wanted to be in and feel trapped. God can turn your circumstances around, although it might take a while. He listens when you talk to him.

But they did not live happily ever after. Esther often felt lonely and forgotten. Sometimes the king totally ignored her and she was not allowed to go to him without being summoned.

One day the Jews in Persia were in grave danger. An influential man wanted to have them all killed. But Esther's courage saved them. She even risked her life to do so after praying to God and fasting for three days.

Although Esther had to give up all her own dreams, she never lost hope and did not become bitter. She continued trusting God who used



her unpleasant situation so that she became an encouragement to many and saved a nation.

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HE CARES.

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jewels
IN THE DARKNESS

jewelsinthedarkness@gmail.com
www.jewelsinthedarkness.com

