

RESURRECTION

Blood of the Lamb Book One: *The Crossing*

If you haven't already read Book One of the trilogy,
here is a plot summary:

On a tiny atoll off the coast of the small Pacific island, Onewēre, Maryam is raised to believe that she and the other Blessed Sisters are special: that when they cross to the Holy City (the rotting cruise ship Star of the Sea) at the onset of puberty they will serve the Lord and His Apostles with willingness and joy. But Maryam is wracked with doubts; alone, it seems, among her peers in questioning the Apostles' power and control. She finds herself cast in the role of human sacrifice—her blood siphoned from her body to save the lives of the Apostles from the deadly plague, Te Matee Iai. Her realisation that she and her fellow native servers are nothing more than expendable slaves to the white elite forces her to question everything she once held true—her faith, her allegiances, and her desire to serve.

Weakened by blood loss, she tries to escape back to the village where she was born, aided by the very person who received her blood: Joseph, who is as shocked as Maryam by the Apostles' bloodthirsty deeds. But her father, faithful servant of the Apostles, rejects Maryam, and it is only Joseph's quick thinking that saves her from his violent response. Now gravely ill with Te Matee Iai, Joseph, along with his mother Deborah, convinces Maryam to flee the island, revealing their most precious secret: a boat built by Joseph's late father to aid his family's escape. Maryam, although terrified by the prospect of sailing into the "void" created by the Tribulation that consumed the Earth, reluctantly agrees—but only if Joseph and his mother will accompany her, and only if she can take her best friend Ruth.

She hatches a plan, allowing herself to be recaptured by Joseph's cousin Lazarus, the cruel and unpredictable son of Father Joshua, and is taken back to the Holy City where she is publicly humiliated then bled again, locked up, and left to die. But through her great determination, and the help of her good friends Joseph, Ruth, and blind old Hushai, she and Ruth flee the Holy City in the night and rendezvous with Joseph at the boat. Just as they are about to leave, Lazarus takes Ruth hostage, insisting that they take him, too. With the pursuing villagers nearly upon them, Joseph and Maryam reluctantly agree, and the four set off together—sailing forth into the void . . .

Blood of the Lamb Book Two: *Into the Wilderness*

If you haven't already read Book Two of the trilogy,
here is a plot summary:

Maryam, Ruth, and Joseph have fled Onewēre, accompanied by Joseph's troublesome cousin, Lazarus. After two hope-filled days at sea they arrive at Marawa Island.

However, all that remains on the island are birds and crumbling buildings. They are horrified to discover a huge mound of human bones inside a ruined temple. Perhaps the Apostle's warnings about the fall-out of the Tribulation were true after all?

Meanwhile, Maryam and Joseph are in the topsy-turvy grips of first love. When Maryam flees a passionate encounter with Joseph he is left confused and stung. He scales the island's volcanic peak, exhausting his few physical reserves, and triggering a recurrence of the deadly plague Te Matee Iai.

With this additional strain the ill will between Maryam and Lazarus reaches explosive proportions. Joseph's health deteriorates at such an alarming rate that the other three decide to sail onward to seek help. But they are struck by a vicious storm and the boat is virtually destroyed. Maryam's arm is broken and Joseph's health declines. They drift for days, starving and in a state of shock. Then the unimaginable happens: Joseph dies.

Soon their boat starts sinking. A foreign naval patrol arrives and begins to tow the stricken craft from their waters. Desperate, the travellers set their own boat alight to force the navy to pluck them from the sea. They are imprisoned in the ship, and taken to be detained.

It looks as though they will never be able to leave the crude detention camp. Lazarus is thrown into a cell and beaten for his association with "natives" but Maryam's fighting spirit is reignited by the unjust conditions. Lazarus, too, seems to alter: confessing past sins and announcing a desire to change.

Then Maryam and Ruth spy the first signs of Te Matee Iai on Lazarus and the nightmare begins again. Maryam discovers that there is a cure for the plague, but detainees have no access to the drugs. Taking desperate measures, Maryam fakes her way into a hospital. She finds the drugs and eventually manages to break back into the camp and administer the pills. Although it looks as if Lazarus is beyond rescue, Maryam's sheer determination and strength pull him through.

Maryam vows that Joseph's life will not have been in vain: that she will return to Onewēre with the drug to denounce the Apostles' lies and free the people from their deadly hold.

Now read *Resurrection*, the third book in the trilogy, to find out what happens next in this gripping and powerful series.

BLOOD OF
THE LAMB
BOOK THREE

RESURRECTION

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With thanks to Helen, for her love and support

Satan's successes are the greatest when he appears with the name
of God on his lips.

Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi

For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle III, 1733

CHAPTER ONE

The first time Maryam broke through the darkness that trapped her, she was besieged by pain. The second time, she retched and vomited into a metal bowl. Now, as she dozed away the last of the drug's numbing effects, she dreamed of her victorious return, and of the smile that lit her father's face as he welcomed her home. He had reached his arms out to her, calling her into his embrace, and they stood together beneath a halo of golden light, as if Onewēre's sun shone down for them alone. Its warmth ebbed deep into her bones, so calming and relaxing that, as she awoke, it took her several minutes to register where she was. Grubby beige curtains separated her from the next-door beds, while overhead the one bare light-bulb—coated with white phosphate dust—circled in a languid breeze that rippled the curtains at the foot of her bed. *Of course . . . the hospital.* The other place—the lush green island—was no more than a wishful dream.

Fear knotted her stomach as she reached over and tentatively ran her fingers along the bandage encasing her arm. She could feel the joint of her shoulder, then the padded clump around the point of pain, and finally—praise be!—the long thin line of her lower arm. *Still there!*

She'd been so scared when Charlie had insisted she return to the hospital for treatment of the infection that was eating into the flesh around the site of her broken bone. Had choked back tears as Charlie's kind wife Veramina explained how the doctors would reset the break with metal pins—but only if the arm was

still fit to save. Maryam had gone into the operating theatre so on edge she'd felt the bed shake as she struggled to contain the urge to cry out when they injected a burning potion deep into her vein. Her last rogue thought before the drug took hold was a premonition of her severed arm, abandoned to the scavengers that roamed the rocky tide line in the bay below.

Beyond the curtain another patient shifted and groaned, and someone responded in a soft, soothing voice. Although Maryam didn't understand the words, she recognised the native language of this prison island—this forsaken outpost of the Confederated Territories where she and Ruth and Lazarus were now detained—and she recognised the tone. How she longed for someone by her side who cared like that. *Joseph*. Memories of his gentle face, of his blue eyes beaming out his love, flooded her thoughts. *But Joseph is dead*. Four simple words that formed the endless bleak loop inside her head now he was gone.

The curtain at the foot of her bed swept aside and Veramina's plump smiling face came into view. "Ah good." She bustled over to the bed and placed a cool palm on Maryam's forehead. "It's about time you were awake, my dear. You gave us quite a scare."

"Scare?"

"You didn't take well to the anaesthetic. We nearly lost you twice. Once in theatre and once while you were coming round." She dropped her hand down to Maryam's wrist and checked her pulse. "Never mind. All seems well now."

"What about my arm?"

Veramina handed Maryam a cup of tepid water and two pain-killing tablets. "You're lucky there as well. At first they were all set to amputate, but as they cleaned the wound they changed

their minds.” She winked at Maryam and began checking for movement and responses in each of the affected fingers. “For such a little thing you’re pretty tough.”

A wave of relief washed over Maryam. She had escaped death yet again, it seemed. How many times could she elude it before her luck ran out? Already she had stared it in the eye more often than she cared to count. Even this most recent escape—Charlie and Veramina’s kind scheme to save her arm—was rife with difficulties that could still dangerously backfire.

Maryam beckoned Veramina in close. “You’re sure the doctors don’t suspect I’m from the camp?”

The older woman chuckled. “Believe me, honey, they have enough trouble working in these awful conditions without speculating about things like that.” But now she lowered her voice as well. “We’ll have to take you back smartly, though. Tonight.”

Maryam felt her eyes grow wide. “So soon?”

“It’s not the best, I know, but they’ve gone and changed my shifts on me and I’m off for the next two days. It’s just not safe to leave you here alone. But I’ll give you antibiotics to take and try to pop in now and then to check. The rest is up to you. Promise me you’ll give yourself at least six weeks to really heal.”

Six whole weeks? Maryam nodded, but impatience nipped at her. Six more weeks trapped within the confines of that stinking camp felt like a life sentence.

Veramina laughed, the sound bursting forth like water from a tidal vent. “Lord love you, girl! You’re as grumpy-faced as my old man!” She patted Maryam’s cheek, then slipped through the curtain to the next-door bed. “Now Essie,” she boomed, “I told you once already not to bring this raja makan in more sweets . . .”

RESURRECTION

As Veramina berated the poor woman, Maryam closed her eyes and concentrated on her breath until the world beyond her curtains faded to a background drone. She had to think, to clear her head completely of the drug. She'd already made the decision to return to Onewēre, but now it looked as if she had six weeks in which to plan her escape. Somehow in that time she must source the tree that cured the plague Te Matee Iai, learn how to extract its life-saving essence, then find a way to flee the camp and cross the huge expanse of sea to get back home. It bordered on impossible, yet she had to try. If she could get the cure back to her people and prove to them it would work, she could expose the lies that allowed Father Joshua and his Apostles of the Lamb to maintain their strict controls.

But, despite her best intentions, she couldn't concentrate. Her arm pulsed in the sticky heat and she felt as drowsy and disconnected as when she'd been overcome by sea-sickness on the boat before it sank. She tried to count the blooms of mould on the curtain hanging at her side, too scared to close her eyes in case images of that awful journey came back to haunt her, as they did most nights. One small anemone-shaped splash of green . . . two . . . three . . . a fourth with spindly trails that bled into the fifth . . . now six . . . now eight . . . Eventually her eyelids drooped.

It was evening before she finally shook off the anaesthetic's pall and woke to find the threadbare nightgown bunched around her waist and clammy with sweat. She sat up gingerly and edged her legs over the side of the bed, swaying as the movement dizzied her brain. She knew this light-headedness, had experienced it when Mother Lilith drained her of her blood. Now she took a few deep breaths before she dropped her feet to

the floor. Her arm hung leaden beneath the wad of bandages, and she supported it against her chest with her other hand to ease the throbbing drag.

She shuffled past the other curtained cubicles to the toilets, then stopped to rinse the sweat from her face and run her fingers through her tangled hair. If even this short expedition tired her, how on earth would she find the energy to get back to the camp? Hadn't Veramina said she'd have to go tonight?

As if in answer to her questions, Charlie appeared, pushing a strange chair on wheels. His face lit up when he spotted her.

"G'day, kid! How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Maryam replied. "I just woke up." She looked down at the wheeled chair. "Is this for me?"

Charlie motioned for her to sit. "Climb aboard!"

As soon as Maryam was seated, he spun the chair around and wheeled her out into the corridor that linked the jumble of decrepit wooden buildings. The place was virtually deserted, with the few staff on the evening shift run off their feet and barely glancing up as Charlie pushed Maryam past.

"Vera's stashed the pills you need in here," he murmured as he swung the chair into the treatment room where Maryam had first been assessed two weeks before—the very room from which she'd stolen the pills that saved Lazarus's life. Charlie produced a sling to support her arm, then tucked two boxes of pills right in near her elbow so they'd not be seen. "Take the paracetamol every four hours to help with pain, and you need to take one of the other ones—the antibiotics—three times a day, after each meal, until they're gone." He caught her gaze. "It's vital that you take them all."

"I will," Maryam reassured him, only too aware that the

sole reason this kind white man had stuck his neck out to help her was that she reminded him of the daughter he had lost to an infection such as this. She owed Charlie and Veramina's dead daughter much.

Now he crouched down beside her and met her eye to eye. "Okay, kiddo. Here comes the prob: while it was relatively easy sneaking you in here via the hot-water truck, it's too late in the day for that. Besides, everyone up at Cee One knows I've finished for the day, so if I turn up now they'll think something's up. If we didn't have to do this tonight it'd be easier, but with the buggers screwing Vera's shifts we have stuff-all choice."

Charlie's words were hard to follow, but she understood his meaning well enough. "Is there a way?"

Charlie's forehead wrinkled like a rippled sea. "I thought of sneaking you home to my place, but we live so close to all the other guards I figure it's not worth the risk. The trouble with this god-forsaken island is that everyone knows everything that's going on. The only way I can think to get you back inside the camp undetected is to hide you right in the belly of the beast, so to speak."

Beast? "What do you mean?"

"There's an unused storeroom tucked right at the back of the administration building. If we can get you into the building tonight, you can hide in there until some time tomorrow when it's safe to bring you out."

Maryam shook her head. "That's crazy, Charlie. You shouldn't put yourself at any further risk for me. Why don't I just stay here, and if I'm caught I'll take whatever punishment comes?"

"You're a plucky little thing, I'll give you that. But it's

not just you who'd be punished. There'd be a witch-hunt and we can't afford my Vera's job being put at risk. Besides, Vera's already signed the papers to discharge you, so there's no going back." He rubbed his calloused hand over the bristles on his chin, the sound as harsh as grit on stone. "But you have to understand, I can't guarantee what time tomorrow I can get you out. You'll have to hide in there as quiet as a mouse until the time is right."

Maryam's pulse started throbbing in her arm and she felt sick. "And if they catch me there?"

Charlie reached out and squeezed her good hand. "I dunno, little lady. That's the truth. But I'm guessing the most you'd likely get is a little solitary, where I can keep an eye on you. Worst case, I guess, is Littlejohn could try to deport you—but, trust me, if that looked likely I'd be on the blower to Jo back on the mainland and get her to raise hell. Littlejohn may've black-listed her for now, but that sheila has contacts in all sorts of places and knows how to rock the boat if there's good cause."

Maryam closed her eyes, trying to make sense of what he'd just said. It was hard to tease out meaning from the flat-vowelled accent of the Territorials at the best of times, but when Charlie got excited he talked so fast, and used such foreign words, her brain grew tired trying to keep up. The white woman Jo was certainly on the detainees' side, Maryam was convinced of that, but since Sergeant Littlejohn had banned Jo from returning it was hard to know what she could do, when Jo herself had said how little most people in the Confederated Territories cared what happened in the camp.

If it weren't for the fact that Ruth—and Lazarus—were still trapped inside, Maryam knew she might just as well take

her chances and try to run. But Ruth would never cope in there alone. Besides, inside the camp she'd at least have food and shelter until she'd recovered enough to make her move. Here, outside the camp, where the ordinary islanders were as dependent on the Territorials as her people were on the Apostles back at home, she couldn't guarantee that she'd survive at all. Charlie and Veramina might have helped her to get treatment because she linked them in a strange way to their daughter, but they could hardly be expected to risk more than that.

"Then show me how to get inside," she said now, meeting Charlie's eyes and trying to transmit more bravery than she felt.

Charlie held her gaze a moment longer before he nodded. "Right you are." He stood up and cleared his throat. "We'll ditch the chair just short of the main doors, okay? I'm going to distract the guard for a few minutes, and in that time I need you to slip out and wait for me up by the crossroads. Is that clear?"

She saluted him and forced a smile. "What's the signal when it's safe to move?"

"Attagirl. Just wait until you hear me do one ding-dong of a sneeze, then run like hell."

He pushed the wheeled chair back out into the corridor and proceeded through the hospital until just shy of the last turn in the run-up to the main front doors. There Charlie slewed off into a side room. He unearched a small bottle from his pocket and put a finger to his lips to warn Maryam to keep quiet, then he disappeared.

Maryam pressed herself against the very edge of the doorway and listened as his boots clipped across the wooden floor toward the door. Now he began to speak in the native tongue of the islanders and she heard a deep guttural rumble as

the man on guard replied. Charlie said something that caused the man to laugh, then she heard two sets of footsteps thump down the entrance steps outside. A few seconds longer and from somewhere outside the building, she heard a loud preposterous sneeze.

Daring not deliberate too much, she sprang from her hiding place and ran as fast as she could down the last section of corridor, clamping the boxes of pills against her body to dampen their manic rattling while she crossed the foyer and slipped out through the open door. She could hear Charlie's voice somewhere off to her left, and glanced over in time to see him wrap his arm around the guard's shoulders and manoeuvre him until his back presented to the door. The putrid stench of phosphate hit her as she tiptoed down the steps, all the time watching the guard, who raised Charlie's bottle to his lips and took a long slow swig. She'd reached the gravel drive now, the sharp edges gouging at her feet as she tried to skim over their surface, though the stones still shifted and rattled underfoot. Then Charlie, bless him, started singing like a sea lion on heat and the guard joined in, blocking out the noisy evidence of her flight.

She ran on until she made it to the crossroads, where she tucked herself under a thicket of phosphate-burnt weeds to wait. Her feet felt shredded, her arm one useless shaft of pulsing pain. And she couldn't regain her breath, the burning in her lungs consuming all the muggy air she tried to drag inside.

The evening had settled in now, the sky a cloudless dome of darkest blue. Watery yellow light spilled from buildings and in the distance a dog barked a doleful monologue. Maryam rose, weaving with dizziness, as Charlie finally strolled up the road alone.

“Good work,” he said. “If Littlejohn knew what a useless drunk old Sevu was he’d blow a valve!” He leaned in close to peer at Maryam’s face, and she caught a whiff of something sharp on his breath. “Are you okay? It’s best we walk cross-country to avoid the road.”

“I’m fine.”

In truth, the jagged flakes of rotten rock had bruised her feet, and she still felt weak and wobbly from the surgery. She didn’t even want to acknowledge how much her arm hurt. The whole point of the operation had been to stop the pain, yet here she was feeling as sick and overwhelmed by it as the moment the bone first snapped.

She struggled to keep up with Charlie as he led the way across the shadowy ground. She was caked in sweat before they’d even made it over the first scrubby rise, her heart beating so fast the pulses ran together into deafening white noise inside her head.

“Wait,” she gasped to his fast-retreating back. “I have to rest.”

He retraced his steps and tipped her face up with his finger to study her more closely. “Damn it. I knew this wouldn’t work,” he muttered, more to himself than her. “How about I carry you until we reach the top?”

Before she could even reply he scooped her up and cradled her as he would a little child, careful not to jolt her arm. She lay there, pressed against his clammy shirt, feeling weak and foolish as he toiled on across the uneven ground. His sweat smelt sharp, and she kept her face turned away from his dewy, drink-laced breath. She knew his actions came from a pure heart, but such intimacy made her nervous and uncomfortable, and she won-

dered if, somewhere in the longings of Charlie's mind, it was his lost daughter Sarwendah he lugged across this hostile landscape, rather than her.

They stopped to rest three more times before the silhouette of the administration building and the fences came into view. Charlie put Maryam down and crouched low to the ground. He indicated that she do the same. "That got the old muscles screaming," he panted, wiping beads of sweat away from his upper lip. "Thank goodness you don't weigh as much as your friend Ruth!"

"Ruth would've had the strength to walk herself," Maryam mumbled, embarrassed by her own weakness. If she couldn't even manage a simple night-time walk, how did she think she could flee this place forever and somehow return to Onewēre and set her people free? The whole plan seemed suddenly ridiculous.

"Don't be so hard on yourself, kiddo. Those anaesthetics knock everyone. Even old work-horses like me can be knackered by them." Charlie pointed over to the darkened building. "See that small lean-to off the side of the main building over there?" She followed the line of his finger and nodded as she spied its low-pitched roof. "That's the toilet block. I've left a window unlatched back there, but once you get inside it's vital you don't make a sound. As well as the guards at the gates, there's always another posted just outside the admin block's main front door."

Maryam swallowed hard, hoping Charlie wouldn't hear the catch as fear pressed at her throat. "Tell me what I have to do."

"Okay. Listen carefully. Once you get inside, turn right out of the toilets and you'll see a short corridor. Follow it until it crosses with another corridor, then take the right-hand branch

all the way to its end. That's the room. The door is quite sticky, so you'll have to push it hard, but be careful you don't make too much noise. It squeaks a bit, so open it real slow. It's an old first-aid room, so there's a narrow bed of sorts that you can sleep on, but as soon as it gets light you'd better hide behind the junk. Littlejohn is usually at work by seven, so make sure you don't oversleep. Okay?"

Maryam closed her eyes for a moment, picturing his instructions in her head. "Right, then right again. Awake by dawn."

"Good lass. I'll try to come and fetch you as soon as I can. Hopefully there'll be something in there you can use if you have to pee. But you'll need to drink something, so take this." Charlie removed the bottle from his pocket and poured the last of its contents onto the ground. "Fill it up with water from the hand basin when you need to—just do it really slowly in case the pipes make noise."

She took the bottle and tucked it into the sling along with the pills, feeling it weigh against the main site of pain. No good. Instead, she repositioned it behind her elbow in the fold of the sling.

"All right. I'm ready now."

Together they inched toward the building, crouching low amidst the cover of scrubby plants that clung on to life in the degraded, rocky soil. The first perimeter fence loomed high above them, riding up where it met the building's outer wall to track across the roof in lethal spirals of barbed wire before the meshed barrier resumed on the other side and ran off into the shadows. When they reached the wall of the small lean-to, Maryam had to fight back a groan. The window Charlie had referred to was set as high into the wall as she was tall, and was

no more than one full arm's length wide. How did he expect her to climb into *that*? Even had she both arms free it would be daunting, with armed guards only a short distance away.

Charlie reached up and tugged the window open as far as it would go. "It's gonna be a bit of a balancing act, kiddo," he whispered, "but just take your time. I'll hoist you up onto my shoulders, then you go in backward—that way I can help to balance you till you're through. There's a good ledge on the other side where you can put your feet." He patted her head, perhaps sensing her disquiet. "It's just as well you're such a runt, eh?"

Maryam bit back a retort. *A runt?* He'd hit on her soft spot, a painful reminder she was still more child than woman—in body, if not in mind. But she had no time to stew over the insult. Charlie was squatting down against the peeling weatherboards and tapping his shoulders.

"Climb up here with your back to the window so you can go in feet first." He took her hand and helped her clamber from his knee up to his shoulders, holding onto her ankles to balance her as he slowly rose up to stand.

She felt vulnerable and exposed in the thin hospital nightgown, but she was right at the level of the open window now, so she gripped the top of Charlie's head to steady herself as she snaked her first leg through the void and felt around for the ledge with her toes. Once her first foot was stable, Charlie reached up and supported her under her armpits while she hooked her other leg over the sill, then he helped to guide her as she slithered through. But just when she thought she was safely clear, she knocked the sling against the side of the opening and the empty bottle clinked against the wooden frame. For a moment

both of them froze, Maryam anxiously holding her breath, before Charlie must have decided it was safe and stepped away from the wall.

She balanced on the window sill and stared out at him, too scared to speak. Below her, he mimed how she should shut the window and fix its catches tight. When he had finished she waved her thanks, trying not to panic as she watched him fade off into the shadows, out of view. From here on she was on her own.

Glancing behind her, she realised she was perched above a toilet, and cautiously inched down onto the rim of the bowl. More securely balanced now, she eased the window shut, moving as slowly as a sea slug to avoid further noise. Sweat was dripping freely down her temples and her legs had started to tremble uncontrollably by the time she'd secured the latches and climbed down to the floor. She collapsed onto the toilet seat and waited for the panic to pass.

At last she removed the bottle from her sling and unscrewed the cleverly devised cap, glad she'd seen Charlie undo it earlier: she'd never have guessed. She placed the mouth of the bottle beneath the basin tap and turned it only a fraction, her ears on high alert as the first drops fell. The sound was so subtle she risked turning the tap a little more, allowing a tiny stream of water to flow into the bottle's mouth until it filled. Then she made her way out into the corridor. The wooden floorboards felt spongy beneath her feet, so she took one footstep at a time, careful to place her weight down gradually then pause again between each step. By the time she faced the door to her hiding place her pulse was running fast and jittery, her arm throbbing in perfect time.

Little by heart-stopping little, she turned the handle of the door and pushed. Nothing. It would not budge. Again she tried, pressing her shoulder against it to add extra weight. She gripped tight to the handle, ready to stop if she pushed too hard and the door decided to creak open, but instead it gave way with a scraping sigh. All the little hairs at the base of her scalp sprang up as she tried to gauge whether the sound had been loud enough to alert the guard.

But her luck seemed to be holding, and within five minutes she was safe inside the stuffy room that Charlie had so casually referred to as the belly of the beast. Now all she could do was wait. She took two more of the painkillers, pulling a face as she swallowed the tainted water. Whatever had been inside the bottle tasted foul. Then she curled herself up on the hard little bunk, wriggling around until her arm was comfortable enough, and closed her eyes—sending out a plea to the universe that Charlie would rescue her first thing tomorrow . . . before she was discovered by anybody else.