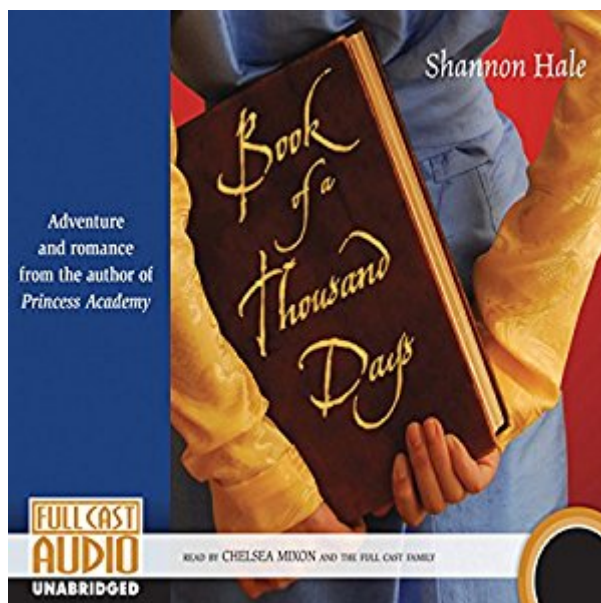


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Book Of A Thousand Days



Synopsis

When Lady Saren defies her father's command to marry the vicious Lord Khasar, she is sealed in a tower with only her serving maid, Dashti, for company. In their cramped, dark space Dashti pours her thoughts into a daily journal while pitiless solitude engulfs them. At first the girl is optimistic: they have food aplenty, candles for light, and even a visit from Lady Saren's true love, Khan Tegus - though he can only call to them from outside their walls. But Saren is ill of mind, the outside world is changing, and their circumstances soon grow desperate. And even if they do escape, they must still face the eerie malice of Lord Khasar. To survive, Dashti and Saren forge a bond of devotion and deception that will test them to their limits. Once again, Shannon Hale, author of the Newbery Honor Book *Princess Academy*, weaves an enchanting and original fantasy that will catch and hold listeners breathless in its spell.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reader thoughts: OK. I absolutely loved this book (yay for full-cast-audio), and it would be the BEST ever except for this one scene I didn't like (the way Dashti defeated the bad guy, but at least it worked). That's me, picky. This book reminded me of *Ella Enchanted* in the sense that both authors use a lot of emotions to further the plot and side-characters that wreak havoc and the main character's love is in the dark about protagonist's biggest secret. SH, though, had a bigger overall plot involving countries, while GCL's was more compressed on a smaller scale within her own household (stepmother troubles and all that). Oh, and I loved the worldbuilding here. What other

fantasy story mentions a pet yak? The kingdom is ruled not by a king but a Kahn! Also, even the religious system is believable and well developed. The traditions, superstitions, history, and music are all well put together and just make the story even better. And the songs are simple but perfect. Usually, I don't like journal stories, but SH pulled it off quite well. It's even better than *The Goose Girl*. Writer thoughts Why did journalling work as a medium for this story, but it doesn't work for other stories? Here are my guesses. 1, a lot of the conflicts lasted longer than one day. So, none of the danger was over when Dashti was penning the day's activities. She and Saren were still stuck in the tower, still starving. Sometimes Dashti even wrote in her journal while something was happening, and she would pause or sketch or wait in fear in the dark. This made the action feel real. 2, inner dialogue and reflections. Dashti often added her own commentary later. Things like, "I shouldn't have thought that about my lady; ancestors, forgive me!" or "Why didn't I say/do this?" or "I'll never forget the way he smells." It's delightful to read. We experience all her joy and regret with her. 3, the journal was a plot point. First, she's chronicling her days in the tower, and the journal would be there to explain why two female corpses are locked in a tower. Later, she's lying about everything, and the journal would get her killed if someone found it. So, it is important. It's like the reader gets to hold a piece of the world.

Book of a Thousand Days is loosely based around the little known Brothers Grimm fairy tale called 'Maid Maleen'. Like the original tale a young girl is locked in a tower for 7 years by her father and when released finds her kingdom gone to marauders. Hale recaptures the essence of the story perfectly, while also doing what she does best; she re-conjures the tale as a story for young girls to read and find strength in. From the handmaiden Dashti's journal we see the events unfold that not only lead her Lady Saren to the tower, but also Dashti. Determined to keep an accurate recounting of their seven long years in the Tower, Dashti reports vary from the mundane ("My Lady doesn't recall squinting." pg. 24) to the frightening. Each entry is marked by the number of days they have been stuck inside the tower and Hale does an excellent job of communicating both Dashti's hope that things will work out and her despair that they will never see the sky again. The book is separated into two parts. There is the first part, which speaks of their time in the Tower and the second part, which talks of the after. In the first part Saren does little more than complain, moan and make Dashti's life more difficult than it already is. The moments of peace that descend are too far between and by the end of the second year even Dashti is becoming sick of Saren's whining. The second part Saren becomes slightly less of a burden. She spends much of the first half of the second part still whining and scared, but a gift from Dashti and a job she is good at lifts her spirits a

lot. I liked her better for the job, though what she continually asks of Dashti is beyond the pale. The villain, Khasar, is despicable and terrifying. He sold his soul for a dark power that gives him an advantage, but makes him as inhuman as possible. How Dashti's deals with him is fitting. Saren's beau, Khan Tegus, is both flawed and perfect at the same time. He breaks his promise to Dashti and Saren, but when the true history between him and Saren is revealed is understandable. The novel has a distinctly asian flair to it--from the pictures that 'Dashti' draws in her journals to the belief system, but it fits quite appropriately. There is a number of ironic twists, but this is basically a story driven by characters. Like every day life not everything that happens to Dashti is 'adventurous' or 'amazing'. We are basically reading her diary and like any other diary there are mundane things that are important to her, but not necessarily life shattering. *Book of a Thousand Days* is a wonderful, amusing and thoughtful book that promotes a protagonist who isn't beautiful, but relies on her wits and her inherent good nature to survive. Dashti really epitomizes the old saying 'do good unto others' because proves it daily.

This is one of the most realistic fictional accounts I've ever read about being a caregiver to someone who is emotionally and mentally unstable. What makes it fun is that the realism is packaged in a fairy-tale-turned-novel. Unfortunately, the original fairy-tale, *Maid Maleen*, is rarely told anymore. It's about a beautiful lady whose father locks her in a tower for refusing to marry the man he chose for her. She awaits rescue, but when none comes, she up and rescues herself. And that's only the beginning. In *Book of a Thousand Days*, Shannon Hale gives the story a few extra twists. Most importantly, the heroine is no longer the lady herself, but rather the lady's maid--Dashti, a mucker (the lowest kind of peasant). Dashti cooks, cleans, and plans for them both. She's the one who breaks them out of the tower, faces the villains, and (most difficult of all) cares for the childish, unstable Lady Saren with affection, humor, and patience. As far as style goes, it's mostly well-written. Dashti narrates the story through her journal, and her upbeat nature makes for a fun read. I did feel that the dialogue sometimes got a bit awkward, but not enough to ruin the story. As for the rest, of course there's adventure and romance, which I enjoy, but the part of the book that speaks to me most is the decision Dashti makes (and has to make again and again) to keep on giving, keep on loving, even when Saren's neediness has utterly drained her. That's the kind heroism and sacrifice I can truly admire.

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