

"A tantalizing, suspenseful, exceptionally
clever novel." — *The Horn Book*



THE THIEF

MEGAN WHALEN TURNER

The Thief

Megan Whalen Turner

For Sandy Passarelli

Contents

[Chapter One](#)

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG I had been in the...

[Chapter Two](#)

TWO GUARDS CAME FOR ME late the next morning, and...

[Chapter Three](#)

I WOKE IN THE MORNING in one of the inn's...

[Chapter Four](#)

WE STOPPED AGAIN EARLY IN the evening. Earlier than the...

[Chapter Five](#)

Earth was alone. She had no companion. So she took...

[Chapter Six](#)

IN THE MORNING WE ATE the last of the food...

[Chapter Seven](#)

GOOD FEELINGS PERSISTED BETWEEN MYSELF and the magus until the...

[Chapter Eight](#)

“WE’LL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL nearly midnight,” said the magus.

[Chapter Nine](#)

I SLEPT THROUGH THE DAY with sunlight and blue sky...

[Chapter Ten](#)

WHEN I WOKE, THE SUN was up and the day...

[Chapter Eleven](#)

I HEARD THE TUMBLERS CLICKING as the guards unlocked my...

[Chapter Twelve](#)

THERE WAS A LEDGE ON the far side of the...

[About the Author](#)

[Other Books by Megan Whalen Turner](#)

[Credits](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

CHAPTER ONE

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG I had been in the king's prison. The days were all the same, except that as each one passed, I was dirtier than before. Every morning the light in the cell changed from the wavering orange of the lamp in the sconce outside my door to the dim but even glow of the sun falling into the prison's central courtyard. In the evening, as the sunlight faded, I reassured myself that I was one day closer to getting out. To pass time, I concentrated on pleasant memories, laying them out in order and examining them carefully. I reviewed over and over the plans that had seemed so straightforward before I arrived in jail, and I swore to myself and every god I knew that if I got out alive, I would never never never take any risks that were so abysmally stupid again.

I was thinner than I had been when I was first arrested. The large iron ring around my waist had grown loose, but not loose enough to fit over the bones of my hips. Few prisoners wore chains in their cells, only those that the king particularly disliked: counts or dukes or the minister of the exchequer when he told the king there wasn't any more money to spend. I was certainly none of those things, but I

suppose it's safe to say that the king disliked me. Even if he didn't remember my name or whether I was as common as dirt, he didn't want me slipping away. So I had chains on my ankles as well as the iron belt around my waist and an entirely useless set of chains locked around my wrists. At first I pulled the cuffs off my wrists, but since I sometimes had to force them back on quickly, my wrists started to be rubbed raw. After a while it was less painful just to leave the manacles on. To take my mind off my daydreams, I practiced moving around the cell without clanking.

I had enough chain to allow me to pace in an arc from a front corner of the cell out to the center of the room and back to the rear corner. My bed was there at the back, a bench made of stone with a thin bag of sawdust on top. Beside it was the chamber pot. There was nothing else in the cell except myself and the chain and, twice a day, food.

The cell door was a gate of bars. The guards looked in at me as they passed on their rounds, a tribute to my reputation. As part of my plans for greatness, I had bragged without shame about my skills in every wine store in the city. I had wanted everyone to know that I was the finest thief since mortal men were made, and I must have come close to accomplishing the goal. Huge crowds had gathered for my trial. Most of the guards in the prison had turned out to see me after my arrest, and I was endlessly chained to my bed when other prisoners were sometimes allowed the freedom and sunshine of the prison's courtyard.

There was one guard who always seemed to catch me with my head in my hands, and he always laughed.

"What?" he would say. "Haven't you escaped yet?"

Every time he laughed, I spat insults at him. It was not politic, but as always, I couldn't keep an insult in when it wanted to come out. Whatever I said, the guard laughed more.

I ached with cold. It had been early in the spring when I'd been arrested and dragged out of the Shade Oak Wineshop. Outside the prison walls the summer's heat must have dried out the city and driven everyone indoors for afternoon naps, but the prison cells got no direct sun, and they were as damp and cold as when I had first arrived. I spent hours dreaming of the sunshine, the way it soaked into the city walls and made the yellow stones hot to lean on hours after the day had ended, the way it dried out water spills and the rare libations to the gods still occasionally poured into the dust outside the wineshops.

Sometimes I moved as far as my chains would let me and looked through the bars of my cell door and across the deep gallery that shaded the prison cells at the sunlight falling into the courtyard. The prison was two stories of cells stacked one on top of the other; I was in the upper level. Each cell opened onto the gallery, and the gallery was separated from the courtyard by stone pillars. There were no windows in the outside walls, which were three or four feet thick, built of massive stones that ten men together couldn't have shifted. Legends said that the old gods had stacked them together in a day.

The prison was visible from almost anywhere in the city because the city was built on a hill and the prison was at the summit. The only other building there was the king's home, his megaron. There had also been a temple to the old gods once, but it had been destroyed, and the basilica to the new gods was built farther down the hill. Once the king's home had been a true megaron, one room, with a throne and a hearth, and the prison had been the agora, where citizens met and merchants hawked their jumble. The individual cells had been stalls of clothes or wine or candles or jewelry imported from the islands. Prominent citizens used to stand on the stone blocks in the courtyard to make speeches.

Then the invaders had come with their longboats and their own ideas of commerce; they did their trading in open markets next to their ships. They had taken over the king's megaron for their governor and used the solid stone building of the agora as a prison. Prominent citizens ended up chained to the blocks, instead of standing on them.

The old invaders were pushed out by new invaders, and in time Sounis revolted and had her own king again. Still, people did their trading down by the waterfront; it had become habit, and the new king continued to use the agora as a prison. It was useful to him, as he was no relation to any of the families that had ruled the city in the past. By the time I ended up there, most people in the city had forgotten the prison was ever anything but a holding pen for those who failed to pay their taxes and other criminals.

I was lying on my back in my cell, with my feet in the air, wrapped in the chain that led from my waist to a ring high in the wall. It was late at night, the sun had been gone for hours, and the prison was lit by burning lamps. I was weighing the merits of clean clothes versus better food and not paying attention to the tramp of feet outside my cell. There was an iron door that led from the prison into a guardroom at the narrow end of the building. The guards passed through it many times a day. If I heard the door banging, I no longer took any notice of it, so I was unprepared when lamplight, concentrated by a lens, flared into my cell. I wanted to look lithe and graceful and perhaps feral as I unwrapped my feet and sat up. Caught by surprise and nearly blind, I was clumsy and would have fallen off the stone bunk if the chain had not still been wrapped around one foot.

"This is the right one?"

No wonder the voice sounded surprised. I levered myself upright and blinked into the lamplight, unable to see much. The guard reassured someone that this indeed was the prisoner he wanted.

“All right. Take him out.”

The guard said, “Yes, magus,” as he unlocked the barred gate, so I knew who it was at my door late at night. One of the king’s most powerful advisors. In the days before the invaders came, the king’s magus was supposed to have been a sorcerer, but not even the most superstitious believed that anymore. A magus was a scholar. He read scrolls and books in every language and studied everything that had ever been written and things that had never been written as well. If the king needed to know how many shafts of grain grew on a particular acre of land, the magus could tell him. If the king wanted to know how many farmers would starve if he burned that acre of grain, the magus knew that, too. His knowledge, matched by his skills of persuasion, gave him the power to influence the king, and that made him a powerful figure at the court. He’d been at my trial. I had seen him sitting in a gallery behind the judges with one leg crossed over the other and his arms folded over his chest.

Once I had disentangled myself from the chains, the guards unlocked the rings on my feet, using a key as big as my thumb. They left the manacles on my wrists but released the chain that attached them to the waist ring. Then they hauled me to my feet and out of the cell. The magus looked me up and down and wrinkled his nose, probably at the smell.

He wanted to know my name.

I said, “Gen.” He wasn’t interested in the rest.

“Bring him along,” he said as he turned his back on me and walked away. All of my own impulses to balance and move seemed to conflict with those of the guards, and I was jerked and jostled down the portico, just as graceful as a sick cat. We crossed through the guardroom to a door that led through the outer wall of the prison to a flight of stone steps and a courtyard that lay between the prison and the south wing of the king’s megaron. The megaron’s walls rose