

# Moon of Israel

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## Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

PRINCE SETI, heir to the throne of Egypt, forms a strong liking for Ana, a learned scribe, and takes him into his palace at Tanis as his private librarian. While walking through the city they see an old Hebrew slave brutally slain by an Egyptian captain. The slain man's daughter, Merapi, known for her beauty as "Moon of Israel," appeals to Seti, who promptly orders the captain beheaded. In Pharaoh's court the next day two prophets of Israel demand the release of their people. When Pharaoh refuses they curse him and his land. At Seti's request his father sends him into Goshen to investigate the tales of injustice to the Hebrews. With him, lest he be too tender-hearted, is sent his cousin, Amenemes. To insure the royal succession Pharaoh commands the marriage of Prince Seti with his half-sister, Princess Ueserti. Bakenkhonsu and Ki, wise men of the court, warn the Prince of impending dangers in his mission among the Hebrews. Accordingly the Princess gives Seti and Ana coats of mail and swords for their protection. For eight days the Prince's Court of Inquiry listens to the story of wrongs done the Israelites. In the desert one evening Seti and Ana find Merapi lost and hurt. They bring her home, thereby awakening the jealousy of Laban, her betrothed since childhood.

Fancying Seti has desecrated their holy temple a band of Hebrews attempt to murder him on his homeward journey. His life is saved by Merapi, whom he takes with him to the palace. Pharaoh desires to punish the Hebrew nation with death or more grievous enslavement, but Seti objects, and the matter is left for the next council to decide.

To prove the supremacy of Jahveh, Merapi undergoes a test in the temple, which results in the downfall of the god Amon. At the meeting of the council Seti refuses his consent to the massacre of the Hebrews. Pharaoh deposes him and makes Amenemes heir to the throne. Then Pharaoh suffers a stroke.

The night Pharaoh dies suddenly and Seti departs for Memphis, where he lives quietly with Ana and Merapi. Ueserti refuses to accompany him and remains behind in the palace, where Amenemes is later crowned Pharaoh. During the coronation ceremonies the two Hebrew prophets again force their way into the hall, causing great confusion. Again the Israelites are refused their liberty.

Seti and Merapi, confident that they have been lovers in past ages, believe themselves brought together now by a higher power. Meanwhile many strange things are happening in Egypt. The waters of the Nile are turned to blood.

All Egypt save the house of Seti suffers from other dreadful plagues. Bakenkhonsu arrives with a message from Pharaoh and remains, feigning illness. Ki also, having broken with Pharaoh, begs to be allowed to share the home where Seti lives so happily with Merapi and their little son.

## CHAPTER XIV. (Continued) Ki Comes to Memphis.

THERE was a long silence, which Ki broke by saying: "Why seek that from Ana which Ki himself is eager to give? Ana is learned, but is his heart the heart of Ki? Above all, why tell him that Ki, the humblest of your servants, is your enemy?"

Now Merapi straightened herself, looked into his eyes, and answered: "Have I told Ana aught that he did not know? Did not Ana hear the last words you said to me in the temple of Amon at Tanis?"

"Doubtless he heard them, lady, and therefore I am glad that he is here to hear their meaning. Lady Merapi, at that moment I, the Sacerdotee, was filled—not with my own spirit, but with the angry spirit of the god whom you had humbled as never before had befallen him in Egypt. The god through me demanded of you the secret of your magic, and promised you his hate if you refused. Lady, you have his hate, but mine you have not, since I also have his hate because I, and he through me, have been worried by your prophecies. Lady, we are fellow-travellers in the Valley of Trouble."

She gazed at him steadily, and I could see that of all that passed his lips she believed not one word. Making no answer to him and his talk of Amon, she asked only: "Why do you come here to do me ill who have done you none?" "You are mistaken, lady," he replied. "I come here to refuge from Amon, and from his servant Pharaoh, whom Amon drives on to ruin. I know well that, if you will it, you can whisper in the ear of the Prince and presently he will put me forth. Only then"—and he looked over her head to where the nurse stood rocking the sleeping child.

"Then what, magician?" "Giving no answer, he turned to me.

"Learned Ana, do you remember meeting me at Tanis one night?" "I shook my head, though I guessed well enough what night he meant.

"Your memory weakens, learned Ana, or, rather, is confused, for we met often, did we not?"

Then he stared at the staff in his hand. I stared also, because I could not help it, and saw, or thought I saw, the dead wood begin to swell and curve. This was enough for me and I said hastily: "If you mean the night of the coronation, I do recall."

"Ah! I thought you would. You, learned Ana, who like all scribes observe so closely, will have noted how little things—such as the scent of a flower, or the passing of a bird, or even the writhing of a snake in the dust—often bring back to the mind events or words it has forgotten long ago."

"Well—what of our meeting?" I broke in hastily.

"Nothing at all—or only this. Just before it you were talking with the Hebrew Jabez, the lady Merapi's uncle, were you not?"

"Yes, I was talking with him in an open place, alone."

"Not so, learned Scribe, for you know we are never alone—quite. Could you but see it, every grain of sand has an ear."

"Be pleased to explain, O Ki."

"Say, Ana, it would be too long, and short jests are ever the best. As I have told you, you were not alone, for though there were some words that I did not catch, I heard much of what passed between you and Jabez."

"What did you hear?" I asked wrathfully, and next instant wished that I had bitten through my tongue before I shaped the words.

"Much, much. Let me think. You spoke about the lady Merapi, and whether she would do well to bide at Memphis in the shadow of the Prince, or to return to Goshen into the shadow of a certain—I forget the name. Jabez, a well-in-

structed man, said he thought that she might be happier at Memphis, though perhaps her presence there would bring a great sorrow upon herself and another."

Here again he looked at the child, which seemed to feel his glance, for it woke up and beat the air with its little hands.

The nurse felt it, also, although her head was turned away, for she started and then took shelter behind the bole of one of the palm trees. Now Merapi said in a low and shaken voice:

"I know what you mean, Magician, for since then I have seen my Uncle Jabez."

"As I have also, several times, lady, which may explain to you what Ana here thinks so wonderful, namely, that I should have learned what they said together when he thought they were alone, which, as I have told him, no one can ever be, at least in Egypt, the land of listening gods."

"And spying sorcerers!" I exclaimed.

"—And spying sorcerers," he repeated after me, "and scribes who take notes, and learn them by heart, and priests with ears as large as asses, and leaves that whisper—and many other things."

"Cease your gibes, and say what you have to say," said Merapi, in the same broken voice.

He made no answer, but only looked at the tree behind which the nurse and the child had vanished.

"Oh! I know, I know!" she exclaimed in tones that were like a cry. "My child is threatened! You threaten my child because you hate me."

"Your pardon, lady. It is true that evil threatens this royal babe, or so I understood from Jabez, who knows so much. But it is not I that threaten it, any more than I hate you, in whom I acknowledge a fellow of my craft, but one greater than myself that it is my duty to obey."

"Have done! Why do you torment me?"

"Can the priests of the Moon-goddess torment Isis, Mother of Magic, with their prayers and offerings? And can I who would make a prayer and an offering?"

"What prayer, and what offering?"

"The prayer that you will suffer me to shelter in this house from the many dangers that threaten me at the hands of Pharaoh and the prophets of your people, and an offering of such help as I can give by my arts and knowledge against blacker dangers which threaten—another."

Here once more he gazed at the trunk of the tree behind which I heard the infant wail.

"If I consent, what then?" she asked, hoarsely.

"Then, lady, I will strive to protect a certain little one against a curse which Jabez tells me threatens him and many others in whom runs the blood of Egypt. I will strive, if I am allowed to bide here—I do not say that I shall succeed, for as your lord has reminded me, and as you showed me in the temple of Amon, my strength is smaller than that of the prophets and prophetesses of Israel."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then, lady," he answered in a voice that rang like iron. "I am sure that none whom you love—as mothers love—will shortly be rocked in the arms of the god whom we name Osiris."

"Stay," she cried and, turning, fled away.

"Why, Ana, she is gone," he said, "and that before I could bargain for my reward. Well, this I must find in your company. How strange are women, Ana! Here you have one of the greatest of her sex, as you learned in the temple of Amon. And yet she opens beneath the sun of hope and shrivels beneath the shadow of fear, like the touched

leaves of that tender plant which grows upon the banks of the river; she who, with her eyes set on the mystery that is beyond, whereof she hears the whispering winds, should tread both earthly hope and fear beneath her feet, or make of them stepping stones to glory. Were she a man she would do so, but her sex wrecks her, she who thinks more of the kiss of a babe than of all the splendors she might harbor in her breast. Yes, a babe, a single wretched little babe. You had one once, did you not, Ana?"

"Oh! to Set and his fires with you and your evil talk," I said, and left him.

When I had gone a little way, I looked back and saw that he was laughing, throwing up his staff as

her pride, or her jealousy, prevented her from doing.

Now the heart of Egypt began to turn toward Seti in good earnest. The Prince, they said, had opposed the policy of the oppression of the Hebrews, and because he could not prevail had abandoned his right to the throne, which Pharaoh Amenemes had purchased at the price of accepting that policy whereof the fruits had been proved to be destruction. Therefore, they reasoned, if Amenemes were deposed and the Prince reigned their miseries would cease.

So they sent deputations to him secretly, praying him to rise against Amenemes and promising him support. But he would listen to none of them, telling them that

Pharaoh heard of it and issued a proclamation that this was not to be done, inasmuch as it would be an insult to the gods of Egypt. Still, many did so and these saved their cattle.

It was strange to see that wall of jagged ice stretching from earth to heaven and destroying all upon which it fell. The tall date-palms were stripped even of their bark; the soil was churned up; men and beasts if caught abroad were slain or shattered.

I stood at the gate and watched it. There, not a yard away, fell the white hall, turning the world to wreck, while here within the gate there was not a single stone.

Merapi watched also, and presently came Ki as well, and with him Bakenkhonsu, who for once had never seen anything like this in all his long life. But Ki watched

why cannot you protect the innocent people of Egypt?"

"Because I cannot," she answered angrily. "If ever I had such power it is gone from me, who am now the mother of an Egyptian's child. But I have none. There in the temple of Amon some Strength worked through me, that is all, which never will visit me again because of my sin."

"What sin, lady?"

"The sin of taking the Prince Seti to lord. Now, if any god spoke through me it would be one of those of the Egyptians, since He of Israel has cast me out."

Ki started as though some new thought had come to him, and at this moment she turned and went away.

"Would that she were high priestess of Isis that she might work for us and not against us," he said. Bakenkhonsu shook his head.

"Let that be," he answered. "Be sure that never will an Israelitish woman offer sacrifice to what she would call the abomination of the Egyptians."

"If she will not sacrifice to save the people, let her be careful lest the people sacrifice her to save themselves," said Ki in a cold voice.

Then he, too, went away. "I think that if ever that hour comes, then Ki will have his share in it," laughed Bakenkhonsu. "What is the good of a shepherd who shelters the sheep ere dying, oh, Ana?"

It was after the plague of locusts, which ate all there was left to eat in Egypt, so that the poor folk who had done no wrong and had naught to say to the dealings of Pharaoh with the Israelites starved by the thousands, and during that of the great darkness, that Laban came. Now this darkness lay upon the land like a thick cloud for three whole days and nights. Nevertheless, though the shadows were

swerving never a word, and just then the Prince Seti reached us and saw him.

"Take that man," he commanded, flushing with anger, and guards sprang into the darkness to do his bidding. But Laban was gone.

On the second day of the darkness the tumult was great, on the third it was terrible. A crowd thrust the guard aside, broke down the gates and burst into the palace, humbly demanding that the lady Merapi would come to pray for them, yet showing by their mien that if she would not come they meant to take her.

"What is to be done?" asked Seti of Ki and Bakenkhonsu.

"That is for the Prince to judge," said Ki. "though I do not see how it can harm the lady Merapi to pray for us in the open square of Memphis."

"Let her go," said Bakenkhonsu, "lest presently we should all go further than we would."

"I do not wish to go," cried Merapi, "not knowing for whom I am to pray or how."

"Be it as you will, lady," said Seti in his grave and gentle voice. "Only, hearken to the roar of the mob. If you refuse, I think that very soon every one of us will have reached a land where perhaps it is not needful to pray at all," and he looked at the infant in her arms.

"I will go," she said.

She went forth carrying the child and I walked behind her. So did the Prince, but in that darkness he was cut off by a rush of thousands of folk and I saw him no more till all was over. Bakenkhonsu was with me leaning on my arm, but Ki had gone before us, for his own ends, as I think. A huge mob moved through the dense darkness, in which here and there lights floated like lamps upon a quiet sea. I did not know where we were going until the lights of one of these lamps shone upon the knees of the colossal statue of the great Ramesses, revealing his cartouche.

We went on through court after pillared court, priests leading us by the hand, still we came to a shrine commanding the biggest court of all, which was packed with men and women. It was that of Isis, who held at her breast the infant Horus.

"O friend Ana," cried Merapi, "give help. They are dressing me in strange garments."

I tried to get near to her, but was thrust back, a voice, which I thought was that of Ki, saying:

"On your life, fool!"

Presently a lamp was held up, and by the light of it I saw Merapi seated in a chair dressed like a goddess, in the sacerdotal robes of Isis and wearing the vulture cap headdress—beautiful exceedingly. In her arms was the child dressed as the infant Horus.

"Pray for us, Mother Isis," cried thousands of voices, "that the curse of blackness may be removed."

Then she prayed, saying: "O my God, take away this curse of blackness from these innocent people," and all of those present repeated her prayer.

At that moment the sky began to lighten and in less than the half of an hour the sun shone out. When Merapi saw how she and the child were arrayed she screamed aloud and tore off her jewelled trappings, crying: "Woe! Woe! Woe! Great woe upon the people of Egypt!"

But in their joy at the new found light few hearkened to her, who they were sure had brought back the sun. Again Laban appeared for a moment.

"Witch! Traitor!" he cried. "You have worn the robes of Isis and worshipped in the temple of the gods of the Egyptians. The curse of the God of Israel be on you and that which is born of you."

I sprang at him, but he was gone. Then he bore Merapi home swooning.

So this trouble passed by, but from that time forward Merapi would not suffer her son to be taken out of her sight.

"Why do you make so much of him, lady?" I asked one day.

"Because I would love him well while he is here, friend," she answered, "but of this say nothing to his father."

A while went by and we heard that still Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. Then the Prince Seti sent Bakenkhonsu and myself to Tanis to see Pharaoh and to say to him:

"I seek nothing for myself and I forget those evils which you would have worked on me through jealousy. But I say unto you that if you will not let these strangers go great and terrible things shall befall you and all Egypt. Therefore, hear my prayer and let them go."

Now, Bakenkhonsu and I came before Pharaoh and we saw that he was greatly aged, for his hair had gone gray about his temples and the flesh hung in bags beneath his eyes.

"Is your lord, and are you also of the servants of this Hebrew prophet whom the Egyptians worship as a god because he has done them so much ill?" he asked. "It may well be so, since I hear that my cousin Seti keeps an Israelitish witch in his house, who wards off from him all the plagues that have smitten the rest of Egypt, and that to him has fled also Ki the Kherheb, my magician. Moreover, I hear that in payment for these wardries he has been promised the throne of Egypt by many fickle and fearful ones among my people."



"I saw Merapi dressed like a goddess, in the sacerdotal robes of Isis and wearing the vulture cap headdress. In her arms was the child dressed as the infant Horus."

he was happy as he was and sought no other state. Still, Pharaoh grew jealous, for all these things his spies reported to him, and set about plots to destroy Seti.

Of the first of these Ueserti warned me by a messenger, but the second and worse Ki discovered in some strange way, so that the murderer was trapped at the gates and killed by the watchman, whereon Seti said that after all he had been wise to give hospitality to Ki; that is, if to continue to live were wisdom. The lady Merapi also said as much to me, but I noted that always she shunned Ki, whom she held in mistrust and fear.

## CHAPTER XV.

### The Night of Fear.

T

HEM came the hall, and some months after the hail the locusts, and Egypt went mad with woe and terror. It was known to us, for with Ki and Bakenkhonsu in the place we knew everything, that the Hebrew prophets had promised this hail because Pharaoh would not listen to them. Therefore Seti caused it to be put about through all the land that the Egyptians should shelter their cattle, or such as were left to them, at the first sign of storm. But Pharaoh

deep, there was no true darkness over the house of Seti at Memphis, which stood in a funnel of gray light stretching from earth to sky.

Now the terror was increased tenfold, and it seemed to me that all the hundreds of thousands of Memphis were gathered outside our walls, so that they might look upon the light, such as it was, if they could do no more. Seti would have admitted as many as the place would hold, but Ki bade him not, saying, that if he did so the darkness would flow in with them. Only Merapi did admit some of the Israelitish women who were married to Egyptians in the city, though for her pains they only cursed her as a witch. For now most of the inhabitants of Memphis were certain that it was Merapi who, keeping herself safe, had brought these woes upon them because she was a worshipper of an alien god.

Once more we stood by the gate watching the people flitting to and fro in the gloom without, for this sight fascinated Merapi, as a snake fascinates a bird. Then it was that Laban appeared.

"Come away with me, Moon of Israel," he cried, "and all shall yet be forgiven you. But if you will not come, then fearful things shall overtake you."

She stood staring at him, an-