

## MOON OF ISRAEL

### CHAPTER I

#### SCRIBE ANA COMES TO TANIS

This is the story of me, Ana the scribe, son of Meri, and of certain of the days that I have spent upon the earth. These things I have written down now that I am very old in the reign of Rameses, the third of that name, when Egypt is once more strong and as she was in the ancient time. I have written them before death takes me, that they may be buried with me in death, for as my spirit shall arise in the hour of resurrection, so also these my words may arise in their hour and tell to those who shall come after me upon the earth of what I knew upon the earth. Let it be as Those in heaven shall decree. At least I write and what I write is true.

I tell of his divine Majesty whom I loved and love as my own soul, Seti Meneptah the second, whose day of birth was my day of birth, the Hawk who has flown to heaven before me; of Userti the Proud, his queen, she who afterwards married his divine Majesty, Saptah, whom I saw laid in her tomb at Thebes. I tell of Merapi, who was named Moon of Israel, and of her people, the Hebrews, who dwelt for long in Egypt and departed thence, having paid us back in loss and shame for all the good and ill

we gave them. I tell of the war between the gods of Egypt and the god of Israel, and of much that befell therein.

Also I, the King's Companion, the great scribe, the beloved of the Pharaohs who have lived beneath the sun with me, tell of other men and matters. Behold! is it not written in this roll? Read, ye who shall find in the days unborn, if your gods have given you skill. Read, O children of the future, and learn the secrets of that past which to you is so far away and yet in truth so near.

As it chanced, although the Prince Seti and I were born upon the same day and therefore, like the other mothers of gentle rank whose children saw the light upon that day, my mother received Pharaoh's gift and I received the title of Royal Twin in Ra, never did I set eyes upon the divine Prince Seti until the thirtieth birthday of both of us. All of which happened thus.

In those days the great Pharaoh, Rameses the second, and after him his son Meneptah who succeeded when he was already old, since the mighty Rameses was taken to Osiris after he had counted one hundred risings of the Nile, dwelt for the most part at the city of Tanis in the desert, whereas I dwelt with my parents at the ancient, white-walled city of Memphis on the Nile. At times Meneptah and his court visited Memphis, as also they visited Thebes, where this king lies in his royal tomb to-day.

But save on one occasion, the young Prince Seti, the heir-apparent, the Hope of Egypt, came not with them, because his mother, Asnefert, did not favour Memphis, where some trouble had befallen her in youth--they say it was a love matter that cost the lover his life and her a sore heart--and Seti stayed with his mother who would not suffer him out of sight of her eyes.

Once he came indeed when he was fifteen years of age, to be proclaimed to the people as son of his father, as Son of the Sun, as the future wearer of the Double Crown, and then we, his twins in Ra--there were nineteen of us who were gently born--were called by name to meet him and to kiss his royal feet. I made ready to go in a fine new robe embroidered in purple with the name of Seti and my own. But on that very morning by the gift of some evil god I was smitten with spots all over my face and body, a common sickness that affects the young. So it happened that I did not see the Prince, for before I was well again he had left Memphis.

Now my father Meri was a scribe of the great temple of Ptah, and I was brought up to his trade in the school of the temple, where I copied many rolls and also wrote out Books of the Dead which I adorned with paintings. Indeed, in this business I became so clever that, after my father went blind some years before his death, I earned enough to keep him, and my sisters also until they married. Mother I had none, for she was gathered to Osiris while I was still very little. So life went on from year to year, but in my heart I hated my lot. While I was still a

boy there rose up in me a desire--not to copy what others had written, but to write what others should copy. I became a dreamer of dreams. Walking at night beneath the palm-trees upon the banks of the Nile I watched the moon shining upon the waters, and in its rays I seemed to see many beautiful things. Pictures appeared there which were different from any that I saw in the world of men, although in them were men and women and even gods.

Of these pictures I made stories in my heart and at last, although that was not for some years, I began to write these stories down in my spare hours. My sisters found me doing so and told my father, who scolded me for such foolishness which he said would never furnish me with bread and beer. But still I wrote on in secret by the light of the lamp in my chamber at night. Then my sisters married, and one day my father died suddenly while he was reciting prayers in the temple. I caused him to be embalmed in the best fashion and buried with honour in the tomb he had made ready for himself, although to pay the costs I was obliged to copy Books of the Dead for nearly two years, working so hard that I found no time for the writing of stories.

When at length I was free from debt I met a maiden from Thebes with a beautiful face that always seemed to smile, and she took my heart from my breast into her own. In the end, after I returned from fighting in the war against the Nine Bow Barbarians, to which I was summoned like other men, I married her. As for her name, let it be, I will not think of it even to myself. We had one child, a little girl which died within

two years of her birth, and then I learned what sorrow can mean to man. At first my wife was sad, but her grief departed with time and she smiled again as she used to do. Only she said that she would bear no more children for the gods to take. Having little to do she began to go about the city and make friends whom I did not know, for of these, being a beautiful woman, she found many. The end of it was that she departed back to Thebes with a soldier whom I had never seen, for I was always working at home thinking of the babe who was dead and how happiness is a bird that no man can snare, though sometimes, of its own will, it flies in at his window-place.

It was after this that my hair went white before I had counted thirty years.

Now, as I had none to work for and my wants were few and simple, I found more time for the writing of stories which, for the most part, were somewhat sad. One of these stories a fellow scribe borrowed from me and read aloud to a company, whom it pleased so much that there were many who asked leave to copy it and publish it abroad. So by degrees I became known as a teller of tales, which tales I caused to be copied and sold, though out of them I made but little. Still my fame grew till on a day I received a message from the Prince Seti, my twin in Ra, saying that he had read certain of my writings which pleased him much and that it was his wish to look upon my face. I thanked him humbly by the messenger and answered that I would travel to Tanis and wait upon his Highness. First, however, I finished the longest story which I had yet written. It was

called the Tale of Two Brothers, and told how the faithless wife of one of them brought trouble on the other, so that he was killed. Of how, also, the just gods brought him to life again, and many other matters. This story I dedicated to his Highness, the Prince Seti, and with it in the bosom of my robe I travelled to Tanis, having hidden about me a sum of gold that I had saved.

So I came to Tanis at the beginning of winter and, walking to the palace of the Prince, boldly demanded an audience. But now my troubles began, for the guards and watchmen thrust me from the doors. In the end I bribed them and was admitted to the antechambers, where were merchants, jugglers, dancing-women, officers, and many others, all of them, it seemed, waiting to see the Prince; folk who, having nothing to do, pleased themselves by making mock of me, a stranger. When I had mixed with them for several days, I gained their friendship by telling to them one of my stories, after which I was always welcome among them. Still I could come no nearer to the Prince, and as my store of money was beginning to run low, I bethought me that I would return to Memphis.

One day, however, a long-bearded old man, with a gold-tipped wand of office, who had a bull's head embroidered on his robe, stopped in front of me and, calling me a white-headed crow, asked me what I was doing hopping day by day about the chambers of the palace. I told him my name and business and he told me his, which it seemed was Pambasa, one of the Prince's chamberlains. When I asked him to take me to the Prince, he laughed in my face and said darkly that the road to his Highness's

presence was paved with gold. I understood what he meant and gave him a gift which he took as readily as a cock picks corn, saying that he would speak of me to his master and that I must come back again.

I came thrice and each time that old cock picked more corn. At last I grew enraged and, forgetting where I was, began to shout at him and call him a thief, so that folks gathered round to listen. This seemed to frighten him. At first he looked towards the door as though to summon the guard to thrust me out; then changed his mind, and in a grumbling voice bade me follow him. We went down long passages, past soldiers who stood at watch in them still as mummies in their coffins, till at length we came to some broidered curtains. Here Pambasa whispered to me to wait, and passed through the curtains which he left not quite closed, so that I could see the room beyond and hear all that took place there.

It was a small room like to that of any scribe, for on the tables were palettes, pens of reed, ink in alabaster vases, and sheets of papyrus pinned upon boards. The walls were painted, not as I was wont to paint the Books of the Dead, but after the fashion of an earlier time, such as I have seen in certain ancient tombs, with pictures of wild fowl rising from the swamps and of trees and plants as they grow. Against the walls hung racks in which were papyrus rolls, and on the hearth burned a fire of cedar-wood.

By this fire stood the Prince, whom I knew from his statues. His years appeared fewer than mine although we were born upon the same day, and he

was tall and thin, very fair also for one of our people, perhaps because of the Syrian blood that ran in his veins. His hair was straight and brown like to that of northern folk who come to trade in the markets of Egypt, and his eyes were grey rather than black, set beneath somewhat prominent brows such as those of his father, Meneptah. His face was sweet as a woman's, but made curious by certain wrinkles which ran from the corners of the eyes towards the ears. I think that these came from the bending of the brow in thought, but others say that they were inherited from an ancestress on the female side. Bakenkhonsu my friend, the old prophet who served under the first Seti and died but the other day, having lived a hundred and twenty years, told me that he knew her before she was married, and that she and her descendant, Seti, might have been twins.

In his hand the Prince held an open roll, a very ancient writing as I, who am skilled in such matters that have to do with my trade, knew from its appearance. Lifting his eyes suddenly from the study of this roll, he saw the chamberlain standing before him.

"You came at a good time, Pambasa," he said in a voice that was very soft and pleasant, and yet most manlike. "You are old and doubtless wise. Say, are you wise, Pambasa?"

"Yes, your Highness. I am wise like your Highness's uncle, Khaemuas the mighty magician, whose sandals I used to clean when I was young."



"Is it so? Then why are you so careful to hide your wisdom which should be open like a flower for us poor bees to suck at? Well, I am glad to learn that you are wise, for in this book of magic that I have been reading I find problems worthy of Khaemuas the departed, whom I only remember as a brooding, black-browed man much like my cousin, Amenmeses his son--save that no one can call Amenmeses wise."

"Why is your Highness glad?"

"Because you, being by your own account his equal, can now interpret the matter as Khaemuas would have done. You know, Pambasa, that had he lived he would have been Pharaoh in place of my father. He died too soon, however, which proves to me that there was something in this tale of his wisdom, since no really wise man would ever wish to be Pharaoh of Egypt."

Pambasa stared with his mouth open.

"Not wish to be Pharaoh!" he began--

"Now, Pambasa the Wise," went on the Prince as though he had not heard him. "Listen. This old book gives a charm 'to empty the heart of its weariness,' that it says is the oldest and most common sickness in the world from which only kittens, some children, and mad people are free. It appears that the cure for this sickness, so says the book, is to stand on the top of the pyramid of Khufu at midnight at that moment when

the moon is largest in the whole year, and drink from the cup of dreams, reciting meanwhile a spell written here at length in language which I cannot read."

"There is no virtue in spells, Prince, if anyone can read them."

"And no use, it would seem, if they can be read by none."

"Moreover, how can any one climb the pyramid of Khufu, which is covered with polished marble, even in the day let alone at midnight, your Highness, and there drink of the cup of dreams?"

"I do not know, Pambasa. All I know is that I weary of this foolishness, and of the world. Tell me of something that will lighten my heart, for it is heavy."

"There are jugglers without, Prince, one of whom says he can throw a rope into the air and climb up it until he vanishes into heaven."

"When he has done it in your sight, Pambasa, bring him to me, but not before. Death is the only rope by which we climb to heaven--or be lowered into hell. For remember there is a god called Set, after whom, like my great-grandfather, I am named by the way--the priests alone know why--as well as one called Osiris."

"Then there are the dancers, Prince, and among them some very finely

made girls, for I saw them bathing in the palace lake, such as would have delighted the heart of your grandfather, the great Rameses."

"They do not delight my heart who want no naked women prancing here. Try again, Pambasa."

"I can think of nothing else, Prince. Yet, stay. There is a scribe without named Ana, a thin, sharp-nosed man who says he is your Highness's twin in Ra."

"Ana!" said the Prince. "He of Memphis who writes stories? Why did you not say so before, you old fool? Let him enter at once, at once."

Now hearing this I, Ana, walked through the curtains and prostrated myself, saying,

"I am that scribe, O Royal Son of the Sun."

"How dare you enter the Prince's presence without being bidden----" began Pambasa, but Seti broke in with a stern voice, saying,

"And how dare you, Pambasa, keep this learned man waiting at my door like a dog? Rise, Ana, and cease from giving me titles, for we are not at Court. Tell me, how long have you been in Tanis?"

"Many days, O Prince," I answered, "seeking your presence and in vain."

"And how did you win it at last?"

"By payment, O Prince," I answered innocently, "as it seems is usual.  
The doorkeepers----"

"I understand," said Seti, "the doorkeepers! Pambasa, you will ascertain what amount this learned scribe has disbursed to 'the doorkeepers' and refund him double. Begone now and see to the matter."

So Pambasa went, casting a piteous look at me out of the corner of his eye.

"Tell me," said Seti when he was gone, "you who must be wise in your fashion, why does a Court always breed thieves?"

"I suppose for the same reason, O Prince, that a dog's back breeds fleas. Fleas must live, and there is the dog."

"True," he answered, "and these palace fleas are not paid enough. If ever I have power I will see to it. They shall be fewer but better fed. Now, Ana, be seated. I know you though you do not know me, and already I have learned to love you through your writings. Tell me of yourself."

So I told him all my simple tale, to which he listened without a word, and then asked me why I had come to see him. I replied that it was

because he had sent for me, which he had forgotten; also because I brought him a story that I had dared to dedicate to him. Then I laid the roll before him on the table.

"I am honoured," he said in a pleased voice, "I am greatly honoured. If I like it well, your story shall go to the tomb with me for my Ka to read and re-read until the day of resurrection, though first I will study it in the flesh. Do you know this city of Tanis, Ana?"

I answered that I knew little of it, who had spent my time here haunting the doors of his Highness.

"Then with your leave I will be your guide through it this night, and afterwards we will sup and talk."

I bowed and he clapped his hands, whereon a servant appeared, not Pambasa, but another.

"Bring two cloaks," said the Prince, "I go abroad with the scribe, Ana. Let a guard of four Nubians, no more, follow us, but at a distance and disguised. Let them wait at the private entrance."

The man bowed and departed swiftly.

Almost immediately a black slave appeared with two long hooded cloaks, such as camel-drivers wear, which he helped us to put on. Then, taking

a lamp, he led us from the room through a doorway opposite to that by which I had entered, down passages and a narrow stair that ended in a courtyard. Crossing this we came to a wall, great and thick, in which were double doors sheathed with copper that opened mysteriously at our approach. Outside of these doors stood four tall men, also wrapped in cloaks, who seemed to take no note of us. Still, looking back when we had gone a little way, I observed that they were following us, as though by chance.

How fine a thing, thought I to myself, it is to be a Prince who by lifting a finger can thus command service at any moment of the day or night.

Just at that moment Seti said to me:

"See, Ana, how sad a thing it is to be a Prince, who cannot even stir abroad without notice to his household and commanding the service of a secret guard to spy upon his every action, and doubtless to make report thereof to the police of Pharaoh."

There are two faces to everything, thought I to myself again.