

CHAPTER XIV

KI COMES TO MEMPHIS

Now of all the terrors of which this turning of the water into blood was the beginning in Egypt, I, Ana, the scribe, will not write, for if I did so, never in my life-days should I, who am old, find time to finish the story of them. Over a period of many, many moons they came, one by one, till the land grew mad with want and woe. Always the tale was the same. The Hebrew prophets would visit Pharaoh at Tanis and demand that he should led their people go, threatening him with vengeance if he refused. Yet he did refuse, for some madness had hold of him, or perhaps the god of the Israelites laid an enchantment on him, why I know not.

Thus but a little while after the terror of blood came a plague of frogs that filled Egypt from north to south, and when these were taken away made the air to stink. This miracle Ki and his company worked also, sending the frogs into Goshen, where they plagued the Israelites. But however it came about, at Seti's palace at Memphis and on the land that he owned around it there were no frogs, or at least but few of them, although at night from the fields about the sound of their croaking went up like the sound of beaten drums.

Next came a plague of lice, and these Ki and his companions would have also called down upon the Hebrews, but they failed, and afterwards struggled no more against the magic of the Israelites. Then followed a

plague of flies, so that the air was black with them and no food could be kept sweet. Only in Seti's palace there were no flies, and in the garden but a few. After this a terrible pest began among the cattle, whereof thousands died. But of Seti's great herd not one was even sick, nor, as we learned, was there a hoof the less in the land of Goshen.

This plague struck Egypt but a little while after Merapi had given birth to a son, a very beautiful child with his mother's eyes, that was named Seti after his father. Now the marvel of the escape of the Prince and his household and all that was his from these curses spread abroad and made much talk, so that many sent to inquire of it.

Among the first came old Bakenkhonsu with a message from Pharaoh, and a private one to myself from the Princess Userti, whose pride would not suffer her to ask aught of Seti. We could tell him nothing except what I have written, which at first he did not believe. Having satisfied himself, however, that the thing was true, he said that he had fallen sick and could not travel back to Tanis. Therefore he asked leave of the Prince to rest a while in his house, he who had been the friend of his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather. Seti laughed, as indeed did the cunning old man himself, and there with us Bakenkhonsu remained till the end, to our great joy, for he was the most pleasant of all companions and the most learned. As for his message, one of his servants took back the answer to Pharaoh and to Userti, with the news of his master's grievous sickness.

Some eight days or so later, as I stood one morning basking in the sun at that gate of the palace gardens which overlooks the temple of Ptah, idly watching the procession of priests passing through its courts and chanting as they went (for because of the many sicknesses at this time I left the palace but rarely), I saw a tall figure approaching me draped against the morning cold. The man drew near, and addressing me over the head of the guard, asked if he could see the lady Merapi. I answered No, as she was engaged in nursing her son.

"And in other things, I think," he said with meaning, in a voice that seemed familiar to me. "Well, can I see the Prince Seti?"

I answered No, he was also engaged.

"In nursing his own soul, studying the eyes of the lady Merapi, the smile of his infant, the wisdom of the scribe Ana, and the attributes of the hundred and one gods that are known to him, including that of Israel, I suppose," said the familiar voice, adding, "Then can I see this scribe Ana, who I understand, being lucky, holds himself learned."

Now, angered at the scoffing of this stranger (though all the time I felt that he was none), I answered that the scribe Ana was striving to mend his luck by the pursuit of the goddess of learning in his study.

"Let him pursue," mocked the stranger, "since she is the only woman that he is ever likely to catch. Yet it is true that once one caught him. If

you are of his acquaintance ask him of his talk with her in the avenue of the Sphinxes outside the great temple at Thebes and of what it cost him in gold and tears."

Hearing this I put my hand to my forehead and rubbed my eyes, thinking that I must have fallen into a dream there in the sunshine. When I lifted it again all was the same as before. There stood the sentry, indifferent to that which had no interest for him; the cock that had moulted its tail still scratched in the dirt; the crested hoopoe still sat spreading its wings on the head of one of the two great statues of Rameses which watched the gate; a water-seller in the distance still cried his wares, but the stranger was gone. Then I knew that I had been dreaming and turned to go also, to find myself face to face with him.

"Man," I said, indignantly, "how in the name of Ptah and all his priests did you pass a sentry and through that gate without my seeing you?"

"Do not trouble yourself with a new problem when already you have so many to perplex you, friend Ana. Say, have you yet solved that of how a rod like this turned itself into a snake in your hand?" and he threw back his hood, revealing the shaved head and the glowing eyes of the Kherheb Ki.

"No, I have not," I answered, "and I thank you," for here he proffered me the staff, "but I will not try the trick again. Next time the beast might bite. Well, Ki, as you can pass in here without my leave, why do

you ask it? In short, what do you want with me, now that those Hebrew prophets have put you on your back?"

"Hush, Ana. Never grow angry, it wastes strength, of which we have so little to spare, for you know, being so wise, or perhaps you do not know, that at birth the gods give us a certain store of it, and when that is used we die and have to go elsewhere to fetch more. At this rate your life will be short, Ana, for you squander it in emotions."

"What do you want?" I repeated, being too angry to dispute with him.

"I want to find an answer to the question you asked so roughly: Why the Hebrew prophets have, as you say, put me on my back?"

"Not being a magician, as you pretend you are, I can give you none, Ki."

"Never for one moment did I suppose that you could," he replied blandly, stretching out his hands, and leaving the staff which had fallen from them standing in front of him. (It was not till afterwards that I remembered that this accursed bit of wood stood there of itself without visible support, for it rested on the paving-stone of the gateway.)

"But, as it chanced, you have in this house the master, or rather the mistress of all magicians, as every Egyptian knows to-day, the lady Merapi, and I would see her."

"Why do you say she is a mistress of magicians?" I asked indignantly.

"Why does one bird know another of its own kind? Why does the water here remain pure, when all other water turns to blood? Why do not the frogs croak in Seti's halls, and why do the flies avoid his meat? Why, also, did the statue of Amon melt before her glance, while all my magic fell back from her breast like arrows from a shirt of mail? Those are the questions that Egypt asks, and I would have an answer to them from the beloved of Seti, or of the god Set, she who is named Moon of Israel."

"Then why not go seek it for yourself, Ki? To you, doubtless, it would be a small matter to take the form of a snake or a rat, or a bird, and creep or run or fly into the presence of Merapi."

"Mayhap it would not be difficult, Ana. Or, better still, I might visit her in her sleep, as I visited you on a certain night at Thebes, when you told me of a talk you had held with a woman in the avenue of the Sphinxes, and of what it cost you in gold and tears. But, as it chances, I wish to appear as a man and a friend, and to stay a while. Bakenkhonsu tells me that he finds life here at Memphis very pleasant, free too from the sicknesses which just now seem to be so common in Egypt; so why should not I do the same, Ana?"

I looked at his round, ripe face, on which was fixed a smile unchanging as that worn by the masks on mummy coffins, from which I think he must have copied it, and at the cold, deep eyes above, and shivered a little. To tell truth I feared this man, whom I felt to be in touch with

presences and things that are not of our world, and thought it wisest to withstand him no more.

"That is a question which you had best put to my master Seti who owns this house. Come, I will lead you to him," I said.

So we went to the great portico of the palace, passing in and out through the painted pillars, towards my own apartments, whence I purposed to send a message to the Prince. As it chanced this was needless, since presently we saw him seated in a little bay out of reach of the sun. By his side was Merapi, and on a woven rug between them lay their sleeping infant, at whom both of them gazed adoringly.

"Strange that this mother's heart should hide more might than can be boasted by all the gods of Egypt. Strange that those mother's eyes can rive the ancient glory of Amon into dust!" Ki said to me in so low a voice that it almost seemed as though I heard his thought and not his words, which perhaps indeed I did.

Now we stood in front of these three, and the sun being behind us, for it was still early, the shadow of the cloaked Ki fell upon a babe and lay there. A hateful fancy came to me. It looked like the evil form of an embalmer bending over one new dead. The babe felt it, opened its large eyes and wailed. Merapi saw it, and snatched up her child. Seti too rose from his seat, exclaiming, "Who comes?"

Thereon, to my amazement, Ki prostrated himself and uttered the salutation which may only be given to the King of Egypt: "Life! Blood! Strength! Pharaoh! Pharaoh! Pharaoh!"

"Who dares utter those words to me?" said Seti. "Ana, what madman do you bring here?"

"May it please the Prince, he brought me here," I replied faintly.

"Fellow, tell me who bade you say such words, than which none were ever less welcome."

"Those whom I serve, Prince."

"And whom do you serve?"

"The gods of Egypt."

"Then, man, I think the gods must need your company. Pharaoh does not sit at Memphis, and were he to hear of them----"

"Pharaoh will never hear them, Prince, until he hears all things."

They stared at each other. Then, as I had done by the gate Seti rubbed his eyes, and said:

"Surely this is Ki. Why, then, did you look otherwise just now?"

"The gods can change the fashion of their messenger a thousand times in a flash, if so they will, O Prince."

Now Seti's anger passed, and turned to laughter.

"Ki, Ki," he said, "you should keep these tricks for Court. But, since you are in the mood, what salutation have you for this lady by my side?"

Ki considered her, till she who ever feared and hated him shrank before his gaze.

"Crown of Hathor, I greet you. Beloved of Isis, shine on perfect in the sky, shedding light and wisdom ere you set."

Now this saying puzzled me. Indeed, I did not fully understand it until Bakenkhonsu reminded me that Merapi's name was Moon of Israel, that Hathor, goddess of love, is crowned with the moon in all her statues, that Isis is the queen of mysteries and wisdom, and that Ki who thought Merapi perfect in love and beauty, also the greatest of all sorceresses, was likening her to these.

"Yes," I answered, "but what did he mean when he talked about her setting?"

"Does not the moon always set, and is it not sometimes eclipsed?" he asked shortly.

"So does the sun," I answered.

"True; so does the sun! You are growing wise, very wise indeed, friend Ana. Oho--ho!"

To return: When Seti heard these words, he laughed again, and said:

"I must think that saying over, but it is clear that you have a pretty turn for praise. Is it not so, Merapi, Crown of Hathor, and Holder of the wisdom of Isis?"

But Merapi, who, I think, understood more than either of us, turned pale, and shrank further away, but outwards into the sunshine.

"Well, Ki," went on Seti, "finish your greetings. What for the babe?"

Ki considered it also.

"Now that it is no longer in the shadow, I see that this shoot from the royal root of Pharaoh grows so fast and tall that my eyes cannot reach its crest. He is too high and great for greetings, Prince."

Then Merapi uttered a little cry, and bore the child away.

"She is afraid of magicians and their dark sayings," said Seti, looking after her with a troubled smile.

"That she should not be, Prince, seeing that she is the mistress of all our tribe."

"The lady Merapi a magician? Well, after a fashion, yes--where the hearts of men are concerned, do you not think so, Ana? But be more plain, Ki. It is still early, and I love riddles best at night."

"What other could have shattered the strong and holy house where the majesty of Amon dwells on earth? Not even those prophets of the Hebrews as I think. What other could fence this garden round against the curses that have fallen upon Egypt?" asked Ki earnestly, for now all his mocking manner had departed.

"I do not think she does these things, Ki. I think some Power does them through her, and I know that she dared to face Amon in his temple because she was bidden so to do by the priests of her people."

"Prince," he answered with a short laugh, "a while ago I sent you a message by Ana, which perhaps other thoughts may have driven from his memory. It was as to the nature of that Power of which you speak. In that message I said that you were wise, but now I perceive that you lack wisdom like the rest of us, for if you had it, you would know that

the tool which carves is not the guiding hand, and the lightning which smites is not the sending strength. So with this fair love of yours, and so with me and all that work marvels. We do not the things we seem to do, who are but the tool and the lightning. What I would know is who or what guides her hand and gives her the might to shield or to destroy."

"The question is wide, Ki, or so it seems to me who, as you say, have little wisdom, and whoever can answer it holds the key of knowledge. Your magic is but a small thing which seems great because so few can handle it. What miracle is it that makes the flower to grow, the child to be born, the Nile to rise, and the sun and stars to shine in heaven? What causes man to be half a beast and half a god and to grow downward to the beast or upward to the god--or both? What is faith and what is unbelief? Who made these things, through them to declare the purposes of life, of death, and of eternity? You shake your head, you do not know; how then can I know who, as you point out, am but foolish? Go get your answer from the lady Merapi's self, only mayhap you will find your questions countered."

"I'll take my chance. Thanks to Merapi's lord! A boon, O Prince, since you will not suffer that other name which comes easiest to the lips of one to whom the Present and the Future are sometimes much alike."

Seti looked at him keenly, and for the first time with a tinge of fear in his eyes.

"Leave the Future to itself, Ki," he exclaimed. "Whatever may be the mind of Egypt, just now I hold the Present enough for me," and he glanced first at the chair in which Merapi had been seated and then at the cloth upon which his son had lain.

"I take back my words. The Prince is wiser than I thought. Magicians know the future because at times it rushes down upon them and they must. It is that which makes them lonely, since what they know they cannot say. But only fools will seek it."

"Yet now and again they lift a corner of the veil, Ki. Thus I remember certain sayings of your own as to one who would find a great treasure in the land of Goshen and thereafter suffer some temporal loss, and--I forget the rest. Man, cease smiling at me with your face and piercing me through with your sword-like eyes. You can command all things, what boon then do you seek from me?"

"To lodge here a little while, Prince, in the company of Ana and Bakenkhonsu. Hearken, I am no more Kherheb. I have quarrelled with Pharaoh, perhaps because a little breath from that great wind of the future blows through my soul; perhaps because he does not reward me according to my merits--what does it matter which? At least I have come to be of one mind with you, O Prince, and think that Pharaoh would do well to let the Hebrews go, and therefore no longer will I attempt to match my magic against theirs. But he refuses, so we have parted."

"Why does he refuse, Ki?"

"Perhaps it is written that he must refuse. Or perhaps because, thinking himself the greatest of all kings instead of but a plaything of the gods, pride locks the doors of his heart that in a day to come the tempest of the Future, whereof I have spoken, may wreck the house which holds it. I do not know why he refuses, but her Highness Userti is much with him."

"For one who does not know, you have many reasons and all of them different, O instructed Ki," said Seti.

Then he paused, walking up and down the portico, and I who knew his mind guessed that he was wondering whether he would do well to suffer Ki, whom at times he feared because his objects were secret and never changed, to abide in his house, or whether he should send him away. Ki also shivered a little, as though he felt the shadow cold, and descended from the portico into the bright sunshine. Here he held out his hand and a great moth dropped from the roof and lit upon it, whereon it lifted it to his lips, which moved as though he were talking to the insect.

"What shall I do?" muttered Seti, as he passed me.

"I do not altogether like his company, nor, I think, does the lady Merapi, but he is an ill man to offend, Prince," I answered. "Look, he is talking with his familiar."

Seti returned to his place, and shaking off the moth which seemed loth to leave him, for twice it settled on his head, Ki came back into the shadow.

"Where is the use of your putting questions to me, Ki, when, according to your own showing, already you know the answer that I will give? What answer shall I give?" asked the Prince.

"That painted creature which sat upon my hand just now, seemed to whisper to me that you would say, O Prince, 'Stay, Ki, and be my faithful servant, and use any little lore you have to shield my house from ill.'"

Then Seti laughed in his careless fashion, and replied:

"Have your way, since it is a rule that none of the royal blood of Egypt may refuse hospitality to those who seek it, having been their friends, and I will not quote against your moth what a bat whispered in my ears last night. Nay, none of your salutations revealed to you by insects or by the future," and he gave him his hand to kiss.

When Ki was gone, I said:

"I told you that night-haunting thing was his familiar."

"Then you told me folly, Ana. The knowledge that Ki has he does not get from moths or beetles. Yet now that it is too late I wish that I had asked the lady Merapi what her will was in this matter. You should have thought of that, Ana, instead of suffering your mind to be led astray by an insect sitting on his hand, which is just what he meant that you should do. Well, in punishment, day by day it shall be your lot to look upon a man with a countenance like--like what?"

"Like that which I saw upon the coffin of the good god, your divine father, Meneptah, as it was prepared for him during his life in the embalmer's shop at Tanis," I answered.

"Yes," said the Prince, "a face smiling eternally at the Nothingness which is Life and Death, but in certain lights, with eyes of fire."

On the following day, by her invitation, I walked with the lady Merapi in the garden, the head nurse following us, bearing the royal child in her arms.

"I wish to ask you about Ki, friend Ana," she said. "You know he is my enemy, for you must have heard the words he spoke to me in the temple of Amon at Tanis. It seems that my lord has made him the guest of this house--oh look!" and she pointed before her.

I looked, and there a few paces away, where the shadow of the overhanging palms was deepest, stood Ki. He was leaning on his staff, the same that had turned to a snake in my hand, and gazing upwards like one who is lost in thought, or listens to the singing of birds. Merapi turned as though to fly, but at that moment Ki saw us, although he still seemed to gaze upwards.

"Greeting, O Moon of Israel," he said bowing. "Greeting, O Conqueror of Ki!"

She bowed back, and stood still, as a little bird stands when it sees a snake. There was a long silence, which he broke by asking:

"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 Sacrificer to Amon, 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 worsted by your prophets. 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 no 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."

"Nay, 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 it 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-instructed 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 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 beyond 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 one 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 splendours she might harbour 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 he laughed, and catching it again.

"Set and his fires," he called after me. "I wonder what they are like,

Ana. Perhaps one day we shall learn, you and I together, Scribe Ana."

So Ki took up his abode with us, in the same lodgings as Bakenkhonsu, and almost every day I would meet them walking in the garden, since I, who was of the Prince's table, except when he ate with the lady Merapi, did not take my food with them. Then we would talk together about many subjects. On those which had to do with learning, or even religion, I had the better of Ki, who was no great scholar or master of theology. But always before we parted he would plant some arrow in my ribs, at which old Bakenkhonsu laughed, and laughed again, yet ever threw over me the shield of his venerable wisdom, just because he loved me I think.

It was after this that the plague struck the cattle of Egypt, so that tens of thousands of them died, though not all as was reported. But, as I have said, of the herds of Seti none died, nor, as we were told, did any of those of the Israelites in the land of Goshen. Now there was great distress in Egypt, but Ki smiled and said that he knew it would be so, and that there was much worse to come, for which I could have smitten him over the head with his own staff, had I not feared that, if I did so, it might once more turn to a serpent in my hand.

Old Bakenkhonsu looked upon the matter with another face. He said that since his last wife died, I think some fifty years before, he had found life very dull because he missed the exercises of her temper, and her habit of presenting things as these never had been nor could possibly ever be. Now, however, it grew interesting again, since the marvels

which were happening in Egypt, being quite contrary to Nature, reminded him of his last wife and her arguments. All of which was his way of saying that in those years we lived in a new world, whereof for the Egyptians Set the Evil One seemed to be the king.

But still Pharaoh would not let the Hebrews go, perhaps because he had vowed as much to Meneptah who set him on the throne, or perhaps for those other reasons, or one of them, which Ki had given to the Prince.

Then came the curse of sores afflicting man, woman, and child throughout the land, save those who dwelt in the household of Seti. Thus the watchman and his family whose lodge was without the gates suffered, but the watchman and his family who lived within the gates, not twenty paces away, did not suffer, which caused bitterness between their women.

In the same way Ki, who resided as a guest of the Prince at Memphis, suffered from no sores, whereas those of his College who remained at Tanis were more heavily smitten than any others, so that some of them died. When he heard this, Ki laughed and said that he had told them it would be so. Also Pharaoh himself and even her Highness Userti were smitten, the latter upon the cheek, which made her unsightly for a while. Indeed, Bakenkhonsu heard, I know not how, that so great was her rage that she even bethought her of returning to her lord Seti, in whose house she had learned people were safe, and the beauty of her successor, Moon of Israel, remained unscarred and was even greater than before, tidings that I think Bakenkhonsu himself conveyed to her. But in the end this her pride, or her jealousy, prevented her from doing.

Now the heart of Egypt began to turn towards 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 Amenmeses had purchased at the price of accepting that policy whereof the fruits had been proved to be destruction. Therefore, they reasoned, if Amenmeses were deposed, and the Prince reigned, their miseries would cease. So they sent deputations to him secretly, praying him to rise against Amenmeses and promising him support. But he would listen to none of them, telling them that 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 Userti warned me by a messenger, but the second and worse Ki discovered in some strange way, so that the murderer was trapped at the gate 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.