

Chapter 2: thank us '*Brews*' for returning you '*Gyps*'s water to the canals

A couple of years earlier; Hasani and Banafrit were walking on the eastern inlet shoreline south of the aqueduct that separated the Egyptian city of Qantir from the Hebrew area called Goshen. Both of them were reluctant to journey into unknown Hebrew territory unaccompanied but Bana had been into the Hebrew communities with her father several times and loved the different atmosphere of the people. Even with Hasani by her side, she was still apprehensive to go on the other side of the aqueduct. Today, they thought walking the shoreline south of the 'duct' would be fun.

A young Hebrew boy by the name of Yigal was on his way north walking the same shoreline where his plan was to meet with three of his other Hebrew friends at the aqueduct. He stayed closer to the grassy part of the beach rather than down by the water. When his friends had asked why he did not get closer to the water, he always responded, "Just because." They knew that security was a big issue with Yigal, and this inlet, one of the bigger reservoirs, was a bit too scary for their friend.

Hasani and Banafrit, on the other hand, loved to be as close to the water as possible. When the aqueduct is opened and water gushes faster than usual, they preferred to walk right in. On this day though it was rather calm and they kicked the water to splash each other as they walked.

They were having almost a little too much fun, because Yigal had walked almost completely unnoticed by them. Catching a glimpse of Yigal out of the corner of her eye, Banafrit stopped abruptly, kicked some water and said, "Sani." Not paying any attention to her, Hasani kept on kicking back. She raised her voice and once again said, "Sani, Who *is* that?"

"How am I supposed to know?" Hasani responded wiping water off his face and eyes to see more clearly. "We are in Hebrew country you know. I can't tell from here."

Though Yigal was well past the two of them, he could hear when Banafrit had raised her voice the second time. He saw that they were busy kicking water when he passed and was hoping they were too busy to notice him. When he heard her raise her voice he thought, 'They've seen me,' and quickened his pace to make it to his friends at the aqueduct just in case these two Egyptians decided to chase him.

Banafrit walked out of the inlet brushing the water off herself trying to get a better look at the boy rushing away. Hasani finished his statement, "Let's not bother him; he seems to be in a big hurry."

"I just want to meet him. I have always wanted to have some Hebrew friends. I never get to meet any of the kids our age, you know?" she said walking up the beach a little and without looking back at Hasani.

"Yeah, I'd like to meet some too. All the kids we know in our area are either too young to have fun with or too old and working now. I agree though, I get kind of tired of you too you Egyptian *goyl*." Hasani joked using a slang he had used on her many times before.

"I'll give you a *goyl*," Banafrit yelled as she ran back in the water and cupped a huge

handful of water from the inlet to splash Hasani as he stood on the beach drying off.

As Bana cupped more handfuls to throw at him, he stood stiff and responded with, "Ok, ok. I want to go try and meet that guy too. Let's go! Stop, will you."

"Egyptian goyl, you haven't called me that in awhile, Sani. Are you losing your touch?"

"Maybe I need to lose you and get me a whole new set of friends, Hebrew or not!" Hasani punned as they walked back up the inlet towards the boy who no longer was in sight.

"Where'd he go? He was just right there." Bana questioned.

"We're not that far south of the 'duct' and he was moving pretty fast." Hasani stated.

They quickened their pace to find what they both were anticipating would be a new friendship. The surface of the beach got rockier as they drew closer to the grass and the rocks moved under their feet causing them to slide a bit. "Slow down Bana," Hasani petitioned, "he can't have gotten far. We'll catch up."

The south end aqueduct Bana and Hasani were headed to is an open pit consisting of one large ceramic pipe the diameter of which a young boy of twelve could easily stand in. Throughout the city, starting at this south end aqueduct, manifolds to this larger pipe connect underground ceramic plumbing. Perpendicular smaller piping would then run up through the floor of public buildings providing for the disposal of sewage and other waste. Because of the northern flow of water, the piping would then end up in the Great Canal north of the city.

The pipe sets at the bottom of a v-shaped pit constructed of clay bricks. The top of the large pipe is only a couple of feet below the surface of the ground on either side of the pit. At the time the aqueduct was built, the southern part of the city was still a distance north of this ditch and since there seemed to be no danger, the aqueduct was never covered.

As the city grew south, eventually the citizens put up a short wall to draw attention and guard against someone falling into the piping. On the Goshen side of the pit no fence or wall was ever constructed. The small walking bridges crossing over the large pipe only allowed limited numbers to walk across at any given time.

Most of the time, day or night these paths to the north or south of the ducks had someone moving from one place to another, and especially this time of the day. As Hasani and Banafrit rounded the tall grassy corner that blocked their overall view of the aqueduct, they slowed the pace to focus on their task. To their surprise, no one could be seen.

They stopped for a second and then Hasani broke the silence, "This is rare, where is everybody?" He even looked behind himself and exclaimed, "I've seen the duck with no one on it before, but..."

"Come on, look," Banafrit interrupted. Right then someone became visible a short distance away on the other side of the aqueduct walking towards them. Then two other figures appeared from another path on their side but still a ways from them.

Hasani grabbed Bana's wrist and moved in front of her to walk a little faster. "Do you hear that?" He questioned.

"Yeah, it's down here." Bana broke away from his hold and looked over the edge of the aqueduct.

The young Hebrew boy Banafrit and Hasani had been chasing had both feet pointing down into the crack that separated the large pipe from the pit wall. He was clearing away at the debris which had built up in the open pit and never cleaned out.

Hasani quickly sat down on the brick edge of the pit and lowered himself down. Firming

his feet and bracing with his hands, the incline was only moderately steep, it didn't take much to reach the actual pipe itself.

"Sani's going to help," Bana raised her voice to call to the boy, though he was only a couple of feet away, "are you ok?" She finished.

Looking up, Hasani said, "Bana, he's right here. You don't have to yell."

"I'm only trying to help and I wasn't sure he understood our language," She replied.

"So you yelled so he could understand better?" Hasani asked. Banafrit smiled.

Trying to keep a foothold on the angle of the bricks but leaning on the large aqueduct pipe, Hasani inched his way to the boy and asked, "Are you alright my friend?"

"Yes," Yigal replied with what sounded like a weak mocking of an Egyptian accent.

Hasani knew the Hebrew people and the Egyptian people spoke the same language and he knew Banafrit knew it too, so he gave Yigal a big smile knowing that his mocking accent was Yigal's way of making fun of what Banafrit had said. Hasani said to Yigal, "That looks like it hurts. Your toes are wedged between the walls of the pit and the 'duck'. Lay flat and let me twist your sandal. I think I can free you that way."

Yigal defended his actions that caused his dilemma, "I am supposed to meet along the 'duck' walkway with a couple of my friends and I thought I would climb up behind them when they walked past and surprise them. I lost my foothold and slid into this crevasse."

As Yigal was explaining, the two people who had been walking towards them arrived. Banafrit had been watching as they drew close and noticed they were Hebrew and were about the same age as the rest of them. As Yigal spoke of meeting with his friends, Banafrit perceived this boy and girl walking up were most likely them and asked, "Hey, you know this guy?"

With big smiles on their faces they squatted down and the girl replied, "I don't know, do we have to claim him?" They all laughed as Hasani twisted Yigal's foot to free him.

Hasani and Banafrit asked if they could tag along as Yigal's friends helped him to hobble down to the inlet weir at the east end of the aqueduct. As they talked, Bana realized her and Hasani had seen Yigal and his friends down at the inlet numerous times before.

The three Hebrew teenagers told their two new Egyptian friends that they also had another Hebrew friend who lived in the governmental part of Qantir and the four of them had formed a secret alliance two weeks earlier. Their ultimate goal of this newly formed group was to make friends with some Egyptian kids their own age and bring them into their secret group.

Banafrit was thrilled about finding her new friends and that they were so open with her and Sani, but as she listened to them she wondered what they would think if they found out about her brother. She just had to ask, "Are you sure you want to be friends with us," she hesitated before finishing, "my brother works for the slave masters?"

Simchona, the Hebrew girl responded to Bana with, "Anyone who would go out of their way to help Yiggy here like you guys did, are friends of mine."

"Simcha, I didn't know you cared?" Yigal said with feeling.

Simchona, setting next to Yigal, moved her foot over and tapped Yigal's hurt foot ever so gently, "Hmm, you tell anybody and I'll get Chaim and Hasani to stuff you back down in that pit again, head first."

At the end of a good chuckle, Chaim said, "Let us talk to Assir, our friend in the city, and we can start figuring out together as a secret team how we can change all this conflict between our people."

Hasani asked, "Bana and I would like that very much. We only see you guys south of the 'duck' though, are you allowed to come up our way?"

"'Duck', I like it," Chaim chimed in. "Sometimes we do with family but by ourselves, not really. We have to be careful of the taskmaster scouts and all, but with you guys to hang with I'm sure we'll make a way. We really do have to be careful though."

One meeting lead to another and the original secret gang called "Ha Ra'ah Arba" meaning "The Friends of Four" soon changed to "Ha Ra'ah Shesh" which means, "The Friends of Six." Since the group had started Hebrew and the name was Hebrew, Hasani and Banafrit relished in keeping the name Hebrew. The more they knew of their new friends and their history, the more it intrigued Hasani and Banafrit.

Hasani would never forget how Yigal was a bit shaky this first encounter as Yigal thought that the two Egyptian kids were there to spy on them. Hasani still smiled when he thought how he and Bana just wanted to say, "Hi."

Now, a couple of years later; it had been one week since the water to blood incident had happened and they hadn't had a meeting all together for two weeks. Usually they tried to have a 'formal meeting', as Yigal like to put it, at least once a week, but these past two weeks it was hard for Assir to get away from the city and Hasani had started a new job working for Bana's father.

Yigal knew he would be the first to arrive, he always was. 'I like being the first at the meetings,' he thought to himself. 'I'm going to be the first to give my idea on what happened with the water and then no one else will be able to even speculate.'

He always had a grayish, somewhat worn, triangular cloth draped across his chest on the outside of his tunic. Tied on the right side of his neck, it extended under the left arm, loose enough to be comfortable. The bulk of the cloth always flapped on his back. Even the other five of "Ha Ra'ah Shesh" rarely saw him take off his self-acclaimed 'cloak of authority'.

Since the others had not arrived yet, he untied the cloth from the side of his neck and bent over to dust off the two flattest rocks where he and Bana always sat. Today was no different than any other in Yigal's eyes and he wanted everyone to be comfortable.

The faint, newly developed, masculine voice of Hasani caught Yigal's attention from up towards Bana's house, so he quickly retied the cherished 'cloak of authority' back to his neck. He somewhat secretly moved toward the path to see if he could see Hasani before Hasani saw him. I hope to hide out of the way and surprise Hasani.

"Yig-gool, Yig-gool" Hasani chanted as he got closer to the groups semi-secret hide-out.

"Yee-gal, Yee-gal!" Yigal grunted frustratingly. "My name is pronounced, Yee-gal, Hasani! Get a clue, would you?"

"Yeeg-gal, Yee-gool, how long have we known each other?"

"Fifteen years and we're only fourteen." Yigal said, forming the huge crooked smile that always made everybody laugh. They both broke out laughing while hugging each other. Hasani wouldn't let go while Yigal patted him on the back and said, "Ok, I know it's only been almost three."

"Ok, ok." Yigal said. "You'd think we hadn't seen each other for fifteen years. It's only been a couple of weeks."

"And, oh Bana's personal god, what a week it has been." Hasani chuckled. "Listen, you weren't hiding in there to come out and surprise me were you?"

"Whoooo, meeeee?" Yigal was trying to be serious.

"Don't you remember that's how we met; you were going to do that to Chaim and Simcha?" Hasani could hardly keep from laughing. "And you are always the first one here, we all know that."

You can't jump out and surprise anybody Yig-gool."

"Oh, you noticed that I'm *always* here on time huh?" Yigal is still standing on seriousness, but smiling in pride.

"How many stories have you heard about the water this week, Yeeg-gal? You're Hebrew and I'll bet you know all the stories, all the good ones anyway."

"I only know one, it's not a story and before you leave here today," Yigal was in the process of stating when both boys caught an object out of the corner of their eye coming across the inlet and turned their heads when he finished, "you will know it too!"

"It's Assir," Hasani said surprisingly.

"Wow, it is. Assir never shows up early." Yigal exclaimed as he turned to trot down the short distance from the rocks to the water line of the inlet.

Hasani joined in after him, but took a more mature walk toward Assir.

"Assir, it is so good to see you my friend." Yigal exclaimed greeting Assir.

Hasani quickly breaks in, "Yee-gal, you'd think we all died and left you to search the mids for us." Mids was the slang young Egyptians used for the pyramids.

"You forget Sani, we Hebrews don't build your mids for you, and we don't go in them." Assir turned to face Yigal as Assir defended him. "Us '*brews*' have to stick together my friend, am I right?"

"You is always right my friend." Yigal answered.

Hasani and Assir chuckled at Yigal's attempt at slang. Hasani and Yigal grabbed the front keel pole on the small one-man canoe-like boat that Assir had built himself.

"Before you get out of that thing you call a boat..." Hasani started.

"Careful there Hasani, Assir is going to build me one of these, and then you will want one too, so don't even start." Yigal retorted.

"Give me a break, Yig-gool. I do like his small boat, but only those in Assir's family position could own one. You may be Hebrew, but you got it better than most of us Egyptians."

"Why do you think Yiggy and I hang with you Gyps?" Assir jokes as Hasani looks down, shakes his head and smiles.

"Ha! Got you Sani! Hang with you Gyps, only you come up with those Assir." Yigal says with pride as he looks up to Assir with respect.

"Ok, ok, I can take it, but you need to be easy on Bana when she gets here, this has been a tough week for her." Hasani warned Assir and Yigal.

Hasani and Assir pull the boat up on the shore and out of the water as Yigal hurriedly heads back towards the rocks.

"Have you guys seen Chai and Simcha this week?" Assir asked Hasani as they strolled up the beach towards the grassy patch.

"No, I've seen Bana almost every day since the bloodlet happened..." Hasani started.

"The bloodlet, is that what you guys are calling the inlet now?" Assir questioned Hasani.

"Yeah, that's what Quiby called it the day after it happened, you know, the inlet turned to blood. That girl has about a hundred scenarios to what happened. It just kind of stuck," Hasani answered.

"Works for me, she's a character," Assir responded.

"Yeah, I've seen Bana almost every day," Hasani continued, "but that's because since the water to blood thing, or bloodlet rather, I've been working for Bana's father and she brings stuff to the shop. Also Chaim and I have been working together with a couple of the other Hebrew guys and their fathers to bring water up from their cisterns. Man, that's a job. I was never so happy to see

the 'bloodlet' turn back into water."

"The whole city's personality changed when all the water turned to blood. Since it turned back, nothing is the same. Everyone acts different, they're all on edge." Assir responded as they walked.

By the time Hasani and Assir had reached their hangout by the tall grass, Yigal had gone up Bana's path to the straw cart road. Assir sat down in the sand, backed up against his favorite log, threw his elbows back in a manly way so as to prop his shoulders above the very thick log.

Assir continued the conversation giving no heed to Hasani's looking around the corner to find Yigal. "Good then, you guys did get some water from Chaim's family. When the government found out the slaves had water down here I thought there might be a riot with the 'gypts' coming down to haul it back. You know Pharaoh came up the same day it happened. He used our water since we live fairly close to his Qantir chambers. My dad offered it to him, though my mom hated giving it to his staff."

"What did you say?" Hasani looked back at Assir startled.

"Well you know we live pretty close to the Pharaoh's chambers and all." Assir tried to keep it cool.

Hasani seemed rather intense squatting in front of Assir and said, "That's right, everyone I know has counted on the goddess Hapi and the powerful Osiris to protect the Nile and nothing ever happened. So I want to know how you 'brews' came out of this with water instead of blood right from the start! And how did you not have blood in your water though you live in Qantir, Assir?"

Assir sat up from his semi-slouching position to seem less cool and arrogant about the whole conversation, "I know, I know. Hey I didn't put the stinkin' blood in the canals!"

"Whoa," Yigal came charging in from the far side of the tall grass away from the path, "that's right, you didn't Assir, but I know who did, I know who took it out of the canals too."

"Of course you Hebrews would..." Hasani quickly started back into the conversation as he stood up walked towards the entrance as if he were mad and leaving.

"Lay off them Sani," Bana scolds, as she steps over the beaten down grass that makes up the self made path into their semi-private hide-out. Chaim has to nudge Bana to the side to make his way in because she stopped to make her statement.

Hasani stops to turn around and walks to the back of the clearing to let everyone in. Assir tightens up his legs to let Hasani get by. He then reaches up his hand to Yigal acting like he wanted Yigal to pull him up. Instead, Assir gave Yigal a firm pull that caused him sit down next to Assir. He looked up at Yigal with a silly smile on his face, pointed to Hasani and said, "Please protect me from that evil Egyptian." He could hardly finish his sentence because of the laugh that would not stay in. Between laughs Assir finished, "Please Yig-gal."

Everyone laughed and looked at Hasani as he responded with, "Bana, are you gonna let him talk to you that way?"

Everyone mumbled stuff like, "Whatever," "Yeah Bana, right," and as Simchona, the only other girl of 'The Six', gently moves close behind Banafrit, grabs Bana's arms just below her shoulders, peeks out from behind her head and says, "I'm sorry, but the word evil and Bana don't *even* go together."

As Hasani, Assir and Yigal stand to greet with "Hey's", "Been to longs", "How you doin's", and all the other sorted greetings friends say to each other, "I got your evil on the end of my boot Assir, where would you like for me to plant it?"

They chuckled and oohhh'd as they came into their sanctuary and situated themselves in their usual spots. Bana tried to tone it down but kept things up with, "Now, what were you sayin' "

about 'you Hebrews would' what, Sani?"

Assir interrupted, "Sani was just about to thank us 'Brews' for returning you 'Gyps's' water to the canals, weren't you Sani?"

Everybody broke out laughing. They all knew Hasani and Assir constantly joked between themselves, joking on the edge of serious.

"I was just saying..." Now blushing, Hasani said very slowly as to not sound intimidating, "You guys are always talking about this 'one God' of yours. Now..." and he turned to directly face Yigal, "of course now, you want to defend this new leader of yours," saying even slower as to not sound offensive. "Well then, explain how the Pharaoh's star diviners did the same thing?"

Yigal replied, "It's not our *new* leader, it's our *old* God."

"All the gods are old, Yee-gal," Hasani had a quick reply.

Chaim decides it's time to add his opinion, "You're right Sani, all the gods are old, but our fathers have taught us all our life about the one God who has been around longer than the others."

Yigal brightens up and says, "There you go, *and that's* what I'm talkin' about. My abba has always taught us about the same *one* God who started the world and caused a flood and saved our father Yoseph."

"Well it was something like that." Simchona adds with a smile and slight cheerfulness.

Chaim and Assir agree with, "Yeah."

Hasani regains his thought, "Yeah, I know I've heard you guys talk about this 'ONE' God in the midst of all those stories of yours, but you've never made a big deal about it before now."

Simchona defends with, "I know and most of the time we don't even talk about our God between us. But Hasani, you know as well as we do that the conditions of our people are worse than they've ever been."

"At least the Gyps get to repair their homes and add things to their furniture and get time off to do stuff with their families." Chaim adds. "You know that we never have time for that stuff, because we constantly have to stay at the building process and meet our quotas. I have been laboring for three months now. In two days when I go back they will put the iron ring in my ear. I am tired of this reed already."

Bana responds, "Chai, I am so sorry. Hasani and I were just talking about that last week."

"Yeah, we were." Hasani adds.

Yigal chimed in, "I asked my abba awhile back about me laboring too, but he said I need to stay taking care of my ema. I thank HaShem every day. Sorry Chai, I feel for ya my friend."

"Sani started working with our family down at the shop the same day all this happened at the bloodlet," Bana says as she took her seat next to Yigal. Then as everyone finally gets settled in she finishes, "and we both wondered how long it would be till you guys would start in the labor camps."

Hasani adds, "Yeah, please, don't get me wrong, Bana and I feel for you guys. Every day I see that it's not only you guys and your families; we are being made to meet quotas now too. The Pharaoh has initiated a new working system amongst all of Qantir that involves all of us."

Chaim, Simchona and Yigal chime in at the same time with a somewhat positive, "Yeah, sure, we know."

Bana pipes in to say, "It's true, something is defiantly changing and it started before the bloodlet ordeal."

Assir sunk back down taking a back seat to this conversation. He was hoping they would leave him out of it, but he knew that would not happen so to head it off, he apologetically started, "Hey guys, I know too, and if there were anything..."

Chaim interrupted, "Yeah, sure, we know."

"My dad is the Pharaoh's treasurer, but we don't have it that easy. All the Egyptian servants and officials my dad works with along with the governors know we are Hebrew and they treat us that way. We may not have to physically labor over the building processes, but we are still treated with disrespect."

Simchona responded, "We know Assir, but your family has wealth and time to themselves and you live in an apartment provided by the courts. Our houses are falling apart and they won't give my father time to fix it. My mom or my little brother who is still too young to make the bricks figures out how to fix things."

Assir apologetically says, "I don't know what to say."

Yigal says, "You don't have to Assir. If we didn't want you in our group, you wouldn't be here."

"I know, and you have to know that if I couldn't meet with you guys, I don't know what I would do. I do know a couple of Egyptian guys that treat me somewhat as a friend, and it's the only thing that makes my lifestyle tolerable. But most of the kids of the court families are jerks and I am always the outcast there."

Chaim responds with, "We all have our stuff we have to deal with, Assir. Aren't there other Hebrews that are in the Pharaoh's system? My abba was talking about someone that takes the..."

Assir quickly interrupts, "Yes! I know of two other families that both work down in the administration. Neither of *them* works with Pharaoh, but we are all of the tribes of our father Yoseph."

"How come we never knew this Assir?" Yigal questioned.

Assir answered, "You know I just don't talk about it unless you ask, and you asked. I know I am in a awkward position with *all* of you. Man look at us, two gyms, four brews and every one of us got our own little world going on that don't coincide until we get together like this. I'd like to say I'm the odd man out, but look around." Everyone turns and smiles at each other while Assir finishes, "With the exception of Sani over there," he lowers his voice for expression, "the only even one, we are all a bit odd."

As everyone chuckles, Hasani defends himself, "Hey, I'm in agreement with that statement." He stands and bows.

Simchona reaches up and pulls Hasani back to the rock their sitting on next to her and says, "Assir, I personally want to know what you go through up in the city. I'm sure it's hard living with people that really don't want you around. Sure, we all have to experience the labor end of building this city, even Bana and Sani, but though we are all tired of it, we all know where we stand. The mental crap you have to go through, I'm sure is hard."

With everyone expressing pure surprise on his or her face, Chaim responds with what everyone wants to say, "Mental *crap!* Simchona? Whoa!"

"Hey, we're all stressed here, ok?" Simchona smiles and answers their surprise.

"I'll say!" Bana laughs.

Assir carries on, "Ok, I know, but listen the bloodlet thing is over now. *It is* going to take awhile to get back to normal, I mean the blood in place of water did screw things up pretty bad, but they're working on getting things back on track."

"Who is?" Yigal asks.

Assir continued, "You know it didn't just happen up here in the delta, it covered all the cities down south too. They all started right away to drain the blood that was throughout the cities, send to the desert and bury it. There was also a plan to irrigate the fields into the Nile and send it to

the sea. I mean none of them knew whether it was permanent or temporary or what. Even though all you guys in Goshen had water, they knew they couldn't get enough out of there right away to accommodate all of Egypt.

"Right before the blood changed back to water, and by the way - did you notice it lasted exactly seven days, I don't know what that means - but... anyway the Hebrew engineers were already drawing up plans to dig what they called 'backtrack canals and weirs' down into the government cities."

"*Backtrack canals? And Hebrew engineers?*" Hasani beat everyone else from asking.

"Yes. First of all we all know the story of *my* father Yoseph, right?" Assir asks.

Everyone but Hasani answers with, "Right!"

"Meaning we are of the tribe of Yoseph..." Assir tries to continue.

Hasani answers with, "Ok, I remember the tribes. Don't necessarily remember each name or who belongs to who."

"Yeah that's alright, still if my father is Yoseph then it..." Assir tries to continue.

Hasani interrupts, "Assir I know your father is Korah, the chief treasurer, why do you keep saying that?"

"We *brews*, refer to our ancestors as our fathers, Sani, you've heard us all say that before." Chaim said as he nudged Hasani in his ribs.

"I don't get it, but go ahead. I want to hear 'bout these *Hebrew* engineers." Hasani said.

"As I was saying, Sani, you and Bana remember how we've told you the story of Yoseph designing the canal system we all use today so that we can grow food, have transportation..."

Everyone responded with, "Yeah's."

"The Pharaoh of Yoseph's time trusted Yoseph. And even though they don't want to acknowledge it today, the forty two Pharaoh's since Yoseph have still used us in their government. They know we know our stuff and we have incredible engineering capabilities. Don't ask me why, I've just seen the cabinet go to them countless numbers of times."

Yigal followed up, "My father has told me the same thing, it's well known in our tribe. Assir did you get to go down and see any of it first hand?"

"What do you mean Yiggy; we *all* got to see it firsthand." Bana responded. "I know you're talking about down south in the desert places. It just sounds funny to talk about blood being drained into the desert though."

Simchona adds in, "Yeah I was thinking the same thing. My ema said that the whole countryside was red with it. All the grains were yellow and green in a sea of red. They made her and the other women go through to salvage anything they could before it was ruined."

Assir said, "I know, I took my boat through some of the fields and I think it was one of the weirdest sites of all the things I saw."

"All the fields in Goshen produced more grain I think," Simchona continues. "I know it only lasted for *exactly* seven days, like Assir said, but for some of the grains it's time to fruit and I know they all had much more than usual." She leaned up against Hasani, grabbed his upper arm and said, "We could have used these hands to help us pick."

"That's my extraordinary muscular arm muscles you have there miss Sims." Hasani said as he raised his forearm up and swayed it back and forth now resting his elbow in both of Simchona's hands. "These hands need to be used for more masculine work than pickin' some grain."

Everyone laughed.

Bana entered in, "But you really think the produce is greater since the bloodlet, Sims?"

Chaim answered, "I know it is. The fields in the delta are ruined. Everything died almost

immediately. I don't know if it was the actual blood or just the thickness of it and how it clung to the stalks. Ema told me it smothered the stalks and then dried in the sun and weighted them down."

"Stinking gross Chaim, what are they going to do with the fields?" Bana questioned.

Assir adds, "They were pulling them up while the blood was still covering the ground. The stalks of every different kind of produce just pulled up by hand."

"It's like the ground became mush," Chaim continued. "My sisters told me they had to humble themselves and tie the bottom of their skirts up around their knees just to keep the blood from ruining it. They said it still got all over them and their clothes. But when they got home..." Chaim had been looking down at the ground the whole time he was talking and using his fingers to move some small stones around in front of him. When he got to this point he picked one of the stones up and easily tossed it in front of him. Straightening up his back a little, but still looking down, he dried a small tear from the corner of his eye and choked just a little to finish saying, "When they got home, their clothes were only a bit damp and there was no blood stain anywhere on them."

Hasani and Yigal put their hands on his back to comfort him when he started hesitating in his speech. Everyone knew Chaim had a heavy, sensitive heart. The stories of God's mercies would especially make him cry.

"I don't know 'bout yours, but my God is good," Yigal burst in to save the silence. "Huh, am I right or what?"

Everyone expressed their uneasiness in their different ways, but they all agreed this whole ordeal has given them something new to talk about at their meetings. As they moved around and straightened their clothes to find a new topic of discussion, Bana stands up and says, "Wow, look at that!" She notices that a section of the tall grass between them and the inlet is moving differently than just swaying in the wind.

"What is that?" Simchona wonders as she gets to her feet.

Everyone starts to stand a little taller and stretches to see past the wall of grass next to their clearing. By this time they not only see the grass moving, but also hear faint thumps. It sounds like the offset of two or three of the same sound of thumps multiplying along with the grass moving.

Assir says as he strains to see the top of the grass move, "I got to see what this is."

"I don't know that I want to see what this is." Simchona responds.

Looking around the clearing to check out all directions, Hasani says, "Too bad Quiby's not here, she would already be on it." As he catches Banafrit's unarguable facial expression, he decided to agree with Assir, "Yeah let's check this out."

Assir, Hasani and Chaim make their way toward the trampled down grass that constitutes the rough opening into the hideout but since it's in the opposite direction of the grassy disturbance, Yigal says, "are you guys sure you're checking it out or running away?"

"You're not leaving me in here," Simchona agrees.

One thing they hadn't noticed is that the sun was slipping behind the horizon causing the sky to take on a haze. As they rushed out onto the path, they could feel the air was cool and moist. Apparently the heavy tall grass and rocks had trapped the heat of the day inside the clearing.

Assir was closest to the entrance, and as he stepped out first said, "Wow, the air is thick."

Hasani almost ran into Chaim because he slowed down so much, and responded, "And wet. I think a fog might be moving in."

Assir, making his way through said, "Ok, ok let's see what's in the grass?"

Hasani and Chaim moved on toward the inlet a little faster, but still holding back. Assir stayed to the right, but behind.

Banafrit and Simchona came out next, but they stopped on the path letting Hasani, Chaim and Assir check things out. Yigal followed the girls, but stepped in front of them and straightened his sash as though he was protecting them from harm. Simchona moved closely behind Banafrit again and grabbed her upper arms for protection. Giving her friends in front a hard time, she said, "Come on you big boys, protect us from the monsters in the bush!"

Just as soon as she said it, Chaim and Hasani stopped in their tracks. They were now almost to the edge of the beach when Hasani proclaimed, "Whoa."

"Wow," Chaim responded.

Assir had caught up with them, stopped just to the side of his friends and asked, "What is it?"

Yigal, ahead of the girls, but still a few feet behind the guys heard their exclamations and decided to let them report their findings as he slowed down his pace.

Banafrit, still standing firm, but also noticing the guys, came to a stop and asked reluctantly, "Dare we ask?"

Chaim responded, "I don't know."

Hasani said, "We don't know"

Chaim said, "Their frogs, a lot of frogs."

"*FROGS!*" Yigal replied, "Give me a break. *FROGS!*" Now rushing to see for himself said, "All this over a couple of frogs? Wait! Whoa!"

"I don't believe it, *frogs?*" Banafrit responds.

In a couple of places there were groups of frogs hopping together as though they had a particular destination in mind, but mostly there were individual frogs of various sizes freely romping with nowhere to go.

Yigal moved a little ahead of the guys to the right, trying to see down the crisp edge of the line of tall grass that separated the inlet beach from their hideout. Once again, he could see the grass moving abruptly and turned his face towards the guys to whisper so the girls wouldn't hear him, "It's a group of frogs in the grass."

Assir looked back at the girls and reported, "One thing is for sure, there are a lot of them and they are coming out of the inlet."

Simchona, still perched to Bana's back and still standing just outside the entrance, started to respond when she heard something in the hideout. "That means - that's what's in the hideout!"

"I'm outa' here," Bana heightened her exclamation and she and Simchona turned together and screamed, "we're outa' here!" grabbed each other's hands and quickly headed back up the path to Bana's house.

Hasani, hearing the girls screaming, said, "I agree, I'm not sticking around," and all but Assir turned to follow.

"Wait," Assir frantically replied "my boat! They're in my boat! The frogs are in my boat! What am I going to do?"

Chaim became reasonable, like he usually does, "Wait, their just frogs and yes there are some pretty big ones, but still, their just frogs. It just looks scary because there are so many of them. Come on, all of us guys have handled frogs and had fun with it."

Yigal was already far enough up the path to look into the hideout, "You guys handle them, and then handle these that are sitting *ON MY SEAT!*"

As the other guys headed to take care of Assir's boat, Yigal decided to take care of the frogs on his seat himself and quickly went into the hideout, but slowed down just as quick. Yigal did not stop, but he lifted up each step like he was dancing so as not to step on any frogs. When he got to

the rock he called his seat, he stood there looking at the three frogs staring up at him. "Please, please," he requested, and then decided in a scolding tone, "*leave my seat.*"

Just as he said this, two more jumped up on the rock and others started to jump on his leg. "Alright, you can have the seat; just leave it clean for me please!"

Assir, Hasani and Chaim had turned Assir's boat upside down and dumped the frogs out. Yigal made it back down to his three friends just in time to shove Assir off in his boat.

"Ok, their multiplying much too quickly now, let's get gone." Yigal could not stand it any longer.

"Assir, stay safe my friend," Chaim chanted as his friends agreed.

The three of them rushed up to the path and then slowed down to look back at the beach. Sure enough, there were five times as many frogs as there were ten minutes ago. They wondered if the frogs had reached the streets yet.