

## **Introduction to 'Experiencing the Big X' *An Historical Novel***

### **'The Big X'**

'The Big X' refers to the large scale actual event that happened through about 80% of the first five books of the bible. The event starts with a man by the name of Joseph being sold into slavery by his eleven brothers. Joseph is brought to Egypt, spent two years in prison then put in charge of the Pharaoh's agricultural and husbandry enterprise.

Joseph's entire family of seventy moves to Egypt and is given a large portion of the most fertile land in the world, a place called 'Goshen' in Upper Egypt or more commonly called 'The Nile Delta'. Immediately following this, people from all over the world moved into the land north of Goshen, and formed a new community which today is called 'Qantir'.

After a period of 230 years and 44 Pharaoh's, our story begins with the planning stages of an enormous exodus for the remnants of Joseph's family, now 3 million souls sold into slavery and laboring for the Egyptian taskmasters. Thus you have 'The Big X' or 'The Big Exodus'..

Joseph's family is referred to as the Hebrews or slaves. Their God is at war with the gods of the Egyptians and because of their belief in these gods; the Egyptians are the only ones who suffer.

### **Location**

The first section of the book, the plagues, takes place mostly in 'The Nile Delta' (see the extras folder). Egypt is in the northeast corner the continent of Africa. Once the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt actually takes place, they travel east to the country of Midian where the God of the Hebrews gives them instructions on how to live and be a separate people. Yet as they live this separated lifestyle, they are to be an example to the rest of the world.

Their ultimate goal is to inhabit the land of Kanaan, a land full of milk and honey, given to them by their God. After turning away and complaining several times about their living conditions, their God makes them wonder in the desert for 40 years. Because of their turning away and complaining, only their children end up crossing into their destination.

### **Characters**

The title, 'Experiencing the Big X', refers to how the characters in our story experience living through this exodus and then the ultimate entrance into their promised land.

The main 6 characters are teenagers. If you are an adult, please do not stop reading now, there are more adults in this story than teenagers. I used teenagers as my characters, because they have fresh, *unadulterated* views of life around them. This allows me, the author, to give a perspective that is not usually seen by reading the bible account or hearing someone give their commentary on what happened during the exodus.

To preface why I used each specific character as I did, let me give you more background to our story. As the Hebrew community of Goshen grew north and as the Egyptian/World community of Qantir grew south, eventually, by the beginning of our story, the two of them connected.

Though rarely did an Egyptian go into the Hebrew community of Goshen, The Hebrew slaves were throughout Upper Egypt constantly building the Pharaoh's agricultural and husbandry enterprise. It would not have been uncommon for some Egyptian people who are empathic to the

unjust, inhuman treatment of the Hebrew slaves, to befriend the meek Hebrew people. This is basically what my story is about, empathetic Egyptians who befriend the Hebrew people.

If I were to give a one line explanation of my entire story, it is this: An Egyptian boy and girl who have been friends their whole lives and whose families have always been kind to the slaves, befriend four Hebrew teenagers, one girl and three boys.

Obviously, just these 6 characters, each by themselves, present their own situational problems. But, by putting away the two *completely* different cultural backgrounds, all they know is that they are the same age and they are friends to the end. Adults, in any society and cultural setting, CANNOT do this.

The bible says that when the Hebrews left Egypt, many of the Egyptians left with them. Now, looking at my characters, the rest of this story should be obvious.

With any historical novel, the main outline of the story is history. Usually, some of the characters are actual people who were a part of this history and the others are added in to tell the story. With this actual historical event, I used the opposite approach. My main characters are fictional people interlaced with actual people who were part of the original story.

I stayed true to the character of names also. Egyptians have Egyptian names and the Hebrews have Hebrew names. This one negative concern by pre-readers has been the #1 concern of mine from the beginning. I have made the decision to not compromise this integrity.

The first couple of chapters I used their full names when mentioning who says what. You will find that the characters themselves call each other by nick names or shortened versions of the full names, much in the same way we use these as endearing ways to call each other today. After the first two chapters, once the reader has learned their names, I shortened most of the names in the story to these 'nick' names. I do hope it works for you.

As a special 'extra' page I have given a 'Character Tree' called 'Names' with their ties to at least the main characters, whether they are Hebrew or Egyptian, and the chapter they are originally found in. Hopefully this will help the reader to keep track. Also, a chart map of Egypt and how Goshen, Qantir, upper and Lower Egypt are laid out for our story.

I remember reading 'Lord of the Rings' when I was very young. This book catapulted me into the world of intricate, multi character storylines. I am absolutely fascinated by this writing technique and hope it intrigues you also.

I do understand that not everyone holds to this enchantment, so if you prefer a simpler read, may I offer a suggestion; as you read this long epic novel (I can't believe I'm saying this about something I have personally written), enjoy each couple of chapters as a separate series of books. I did try to write them so they would stand on their own.

Once again, this is an historical novel so please don't try to judge me on whether that did or even could have happened. Just try to look at it as an interesting possibility to what may have taken place during this historical event. I challenge you to let this historical novel and my literary license open up a field of dreams about what probably could have happened.

Enjoy,  
Mark

## Chapter 1: Yeah, I know, blood, huh?

Banafrit moved slowly towards the back door of her family's home as if she knew, though she had drawn water a thousand times before, something was going to be different this time. She was tired of being the only one of four children who had to draw the household water every time. Both of her brothers and her sister had jobs around the house to do. 'But why couldn't we switch off and take turns doing our different chores?' she murmured under her breath, the same as she did every time she headed out the back door to pick up the jar she carried the water in.

As soon as she stepped outside, she heard her next-door neighbor raising his voice to the people living in the next house. Halima, the gentle old man whom she sometimes referred to as 'grandpa,' never spoke an unkind word to anyone, but when he talked about the young couple living on the other side of him, it was though he had a different personality. Banafrit had not heard him talk bad to his neighbors so she was concerned to why he seemed this intense.

She started towards them possibly to intervene on her 'grandpa's' behalf if needed and since there is no fence between her property and his she could be there in a quick second. She had only gone a couple of steps when she saw Halima turn away from the couple on the other side of the short decorative stonewall where they were standing, so she stopped. He turned towards the back part of his land, tossed the contents of a bucket he was holding and in one full motion continued turning until he faced the back door of his house and stormed indoors.

As Banafrit and the couple standing on the other side of the wall looked at one another in bewilderment, Rabiah turned to her husband Odián and said in a loud voice so Banafrit could hear, "I don't know why he keeps accusing us of sabotaging his stuff." Looking back at Banafrit with her eyebrows bunched up and stress in her voice, she grabbed her husband's elbow and pulled him towards their home and proclaimed, "We haven't done anything to him."

Banafrit wanted to respond, but didn't know whether to defend her old friend who had never given her his reason for disliking this couple or to go knock on his door and find out just what he was so upset about. She decided for now it wasn't worth the trouble, but still there was this lingering thought that it might have something to do with her own feelings about drawing water out of the inlet today. When Halima dumped the contents of his bucket in the yard, her immediate thought was that it did not look like water, but she was so far away and it happen so fast it originally didn't register. She was sure she would find out what just happened, but for now, she needed to draw the water before her mother got home for lunch.

Banafrit's family lived an average Egyptian lifestyle for any working class family living in Qantir. Occasionally she had met someone from another town outside the city because of her father's work, but she hardly ever met anyone with children. Her knowledge of any place or people outside the city of Qantir was limited because she was not allowed to talk to an adult her family did not know.

Egyptian children only know of the multiple gods that rule everyone's life and have no knowledge of other societies. She knew that there is a god for the sky, a god of the river Nile, a god of the insects and even though Banafrit had only seen the Pharaoh one time, he himself was a god. She had no thoughts of whether the world was round, square, or triangular, red, green, or turquoise.

She did not even know if there were other cities with a Pharaoh.

Something she had heard but could not make sense of is that her city is the only one enslaving people against their will. She knew of Egyptian servants and lawbreakers made to work for little or no pay, this of course, seemed natural and right to Banafrit. Slavery did not.

The brief dispute in her neighbors' yard, reminded her of recent conflicts recounted by her father between the slaves and Egyptian officials. Her oldest brother works for the slave masters and would always speak against the slaves. Banafrit's heart has compassion towards any human being enduring a punishment of a crime for which they were not accused.

She only knew the history of her city and the slaves who built it because she had befriended four Hebrew children her own age who had been taught of their own heritage and told Banafrit these stories. It was their favorite topic of discussion during the 'club meetings' her and her friends held together.

Banafrit once asked her father to teach her of their Egyptian family ancestors, but he said it was not important. "We should only be content with what we have and please the Pharaoh. This in turn will please Ma'at, the Egyptian god conglomerate. Anything else makes one rebellious and the gods will respond accordingly." Her father explained.

Her Hebrew friends knew stories of their fathers and their 'fathers, fathers' as they called it. Banafrit thought that expression sounded funny. They even knew why Egyptians lived in this part of Egypt instead of to the south where Pharaoh and the rest of Egypt lived. However, the stories of the slave history and a time of famine intrigued her the most. This was so interesting because she never had a want for anything, especially food. 'How could people be without food?' she thought to herself. Once again, as she prepared to draw water, these thoughts weighed heavy and she could feel something was about to unfold.

She looked toward the path to the inlet where she needed to go get water and thought of the wonderful job her father and brothers had done re-clearing this particular path from their house. Two roads cross at the back end of their land. Large piles of straw that fall from the carts bringing straw to the slaves for their brick obstruct the road sometimes. One road brought the straw to the slaves, the other road carried carts going for more.

Banafrit traveled this path often hauling water and it was noticeable to her that when the slaves operated the carts, they stayed on the correct path and not one blade of straw fell to the road. When the Egyptian taskmasters steered the carts, they would pay no attention to the assigned roads. Any cart driven by someone on a proper path would inevitably collide with the cart on the wrong path and straw would inescapably end up all over her path.

The first crossing looked as though it is clear of debris, but the second crossing appeared damaged. Her father and oldest brother had spent a lot of time trying to fill in the damaged sections made by the uneven and wobbly wheels of the straw carts. In her opinion, the slave masters should spend more time making the roads better for the slave straw carts than forcing them to work harder.

She wondered whether she should check the path first before going down to the inlet, or just pick the jar up and go. She could not see the portion of the usually obstructed path as it is after a couple of corners down the path. This morning though, she only needed the one smaller jar of water and she could handle it without taking the cart, she decided to pick up the jar and go without first checking the path.

Just as she reached into the bin to pick up the jar, she heard her sister's voice screaming frantically. It sounded as though it was coming from inside the house, but as she turned her head toward the house, she remembered her sister had been down to the corner market picking up 'extras', as her younger brother, Rashidi, called them, for the noon meal. As she strained to hear her

sisters cries, she could tell she was very quickly getting closer and running along side of the house.

Banafrit's parents named her sister Quibilah, meaning 'peaceful'. When she was a lot younger, her name fit her perfectly, but the older she got and especially right now, Banafrit was thinking her sister was far from any sort of peace! Then, out of nowhere, she exploded from around the corner of the house screaming at the top of her lungs.

"Bana, Bana," she could barely get out, being out of breath.

"Quiby!" Banafrit yelled as she grabbed her sister to settle her down, still holding on the water jar she had just picked up. "Quiby, settle down. What is going on with you?"

"Have you seen the water? Have you seen the water?" Quiby's words were barely intelligible since she was out of breath.

Thinking of the water jar she was holding in her hand, she puzzlingly responded, "You mean this water? I have not gone down to the inlet yet. All that's in here is the few drops left over from last night's draw. What are you talking about?"

"Pour out what's left in the jar, Bana," Quiby exclaimed, finally catching some of her breath. "Do it, do it!"

"Ok, ok, but I don't get it." She tilted the jar, expecting a couple of drops to trickle out. Instead, a small stream of thick red fluid slowly flowed out onto the pavers they were standing on. She threw the jar to the ground in front of her and it broke into three large pieces and some fragments.

"Ah, ah, ah!" They both screamed in unison, being sisters, their expressions sounded exactly alike.

"What is that? It looks like...?" Bana expressed shockingly.

"Yeah, I know, blood, huh? It is everywhere. I mean everywhere. I was at Nuri's market getting extras. While I was telling her how much I liked her garlic bunches better than I like Tahir's bunches, even though Tahir's are cheaper..." Quiby started.

"Quiby, get to the point." Bana's voice rose a bit at the end of the sentence to stress her expectancy. Quiby's ramblings are well known.

"Yes, yes, while I was telling Nuri this, she started to rinse off the garlic bunches, as she always does, because as you very well know, Nuri's market is much cleaner than Tahir's." Bana stepped directly in front of Quiby, put her hand on her shoulder and gave her a very stern older sister look as she had to do quite often.

"Ok. When she poured the water over the garlic, the water came out of the bowl red and thick like BLOOD!" Banafrit took her hand off Quiby's shoulder and looked back down at the broken jar as her sister continued. "I was watching her do it and we both screamed just like you and I just did. Then she picked up her water jar, went out to the side of the market and poured it on the ground. It was the same. We both screamed again."

Now Banafrit's curiosity is taking over. She squatted down and picked up the largest of the jar fragments to look closer at the red liquid that pooled into a corner of the lowest part of the fragment.

Quiby continued, "So then I saw Rehema across the road going into her yard. She was carrying her basket and must have just got back from washing down at the inlet. I yelled at her so she would stop, then ran across the road to ask her if she had her small water jar. You know the one she always has with her. She thought I was crazy when I asked her to pour some of it on the ground. She said she did not mind pouring it into my cupped hands so I could get a drink, but if Rehema had the same stuff in her water jar, I couldn't handle the thought of whatever it is in the palm of my hands. I convinced her to pour just a couple of drops on the ground, because you know,

*she* trusts me, and sure enough it looked exactly the same as Nuri's, that's when I knew all the water somehow has turned to blood. That's when I ran home to tell you."

Banafrit stood up trying to make some sort of sense of what she was looking at. "What do you think Bana?" Quiby had to know more. "Let's go down to the inlet. If the water here is red, then I wonder if all the water is red. What do you think it is Bana? Mom says that you know these things."

Banafrit could hear her sister frantic questioning, but her thoughts were on Halima tossing the water out of his bucket. "He must have found the same liquid in his bucket," she said out loud, "and figured Rabiah and her husband Odian put it there."

Because Quibilah was talking at the same time Bana was thinking aloud, she only heard, "Rabiah and her husband Odian put it there." She raised her eyebrows then frowned responding with, "Rabiah and Odian? You think they did this?" Bana came out of her small trance and looked straight at Quibilah as her sister finished with a resounding, "Why?"

"No, Quiby, they didn't do this."

Once again thinking aloud, Banafrit said, "I knew it. I knew something was going to be different and happen *today*. And I knew it was something to do with the water." Her mother often expressed to the family that Bana had an interesting ability to sense things others took for granted. Today, she realized her mother was right.

She looked over to her neighbors' houses hopefully to see if they per chance might be outside and questions them regarding the earlier instance, but for once Quiby made more sense. Banafrit turned back to Quibilah and said, "If the water in the inlet is the same as what we saw in the jar, Ma'at must have something to do with this." They headed towards the inlet.

Qantir is the largest city of the Nile Delta located in the north central part of Egypt. The elaborate canal system running through the delta, and through Qantir, supplied the inhabitants with their water lifeline. The inlet where Banafrit and Quibilah drew their water is a reservoir supplying smaller canals throughout the eastern side of Qantir. In the middle of the city and southernmost end, where Banafrit lives, are aqueducts, which supply a highly advanced system of underground plumbing and water to the easternmost reservoir.

Banafrit wanted to know if their water lifeline is tainted. As they sprinted around the first curve of the path, she tried to tell Quibilah something, but she had to break it up into separated exhaling breathes, and it almost tickled her to say, "I don't think" - "we've ever" - "run this fast" - "on this path."

Quibilah and Bana were laughing as they reached the last corner in excitement. They both stopped in their tracts in exactly the same spot. The river inlet was in fact, dark blood red.

"Oh my *personal* god!" Bana let out with sigh, and once again chopping up her sentence with every exhale, "Do you remember," - "what dad was telling" - "us about last night?"

More in shock than out of breath, Quibilah replied, "You mean about how those old Hebrew guys tried to do a trick in front of the Pharaoh and the court magicians made a bunch of snakes eat one of them?"

Bana, finally catching her breath but hunching down to put her hands on her knees, responded, "No Quiby, I don't think that's exactly what happened, but dad did say that the Hebrews have some kind of leader now." Straightening up and looking directly at the inlet she said, "If that's true, I'll bet you Pharaoh is mad at the slaves and something has gone terribly wrong." Quiby starts walking towards the inlet and Banafrit questioned still standing almost mesmerized, "Do you smell that?"

"Wow! It even smells like blood." Quiby says without hesitating, but not quickening her

step.

"Stop Quiby! I don't want to go anywhere near it and you aren't either." Quiby stops and turns her face toward Bana. Her facial expression tells Bana she is not peaceful about this decision, but Bana petitions her sister, "Let's go back to the house, mom will be home any time and she will know what to do."

Quiby's young inquisitive nature has caused her to look back at the inlet. "What is *that* floating on top of it Bana?" She regains her slow stepping towards the inlet, almost tiptoeing. "We have to go check it out Bana."

"NO Quiby!" Her sister is sharp toned.

Not looking back nor slowing her step she said, "Bana, I think those things are fish! Those are dead fish floating on the water or blood or whatever it is."

"It is fish, dead fish," a boy Banafrit's age says as he came from around the tall weak grass that defined the beach edge away from the water.

"Hasani" both girls exclaimed in unison. Quiby stopped, turned toward her friend who is just a few feet away.

"Yeah," Hasani answered, "is this unreal or what?"

Quibilah looked back up to where her sister was standing and then walked up the path with Hasani. She thought to herself, "I am so glad he showed up, I really didn't want to go down there."

Focusing her attention on Hasani, Banafrit asked, "Do you think it's everywhere or just our inlet? Quiby saw it in a couple of pails at Nuri's market and the stuff was even in our water jar at the house."

"It's not just coloring in the water, it *is* blood and I think it's everywhere. I've been down at the 'duck' for awhile." The 'duck' is what all the kids call the south aqueduct system, which divides the south part of the Egyptian city Qantir, from the north end of Goshen where the Hebrew people live. "I was supposed to meet Uri there earlier and he never showed up. You know how Uri is, he comes and he goes."

Quiby answers even before Hasani finished, "Oh yeah, we know how Uri is. Last week he and his dad were next..." Bana steps sideways so as to be directly between Quibilah and Hasani but facing Quibilah. She raises her hand in a firm stop motion but remains silent.

Quiby stops, looks around Bana at Hasani and says, "Yeah, we know how Uri is."

"Anyway," Hasani continues, "I was bent over, down in the water checking out these rocks that I have only seen in this part in the inlet. I am not even sure that they are rocks, but I had my hand down in the water and moved one of the bigger ones around to lift it out when the water turned red. At first I thought the rock stirred up the water and caused it to turn red, but when I straightened, up and looked across the inlet, the whole inlet was blood red. Almost immediately, three or four fish came popping up out of the inlet. It was thick too, unreal. I don't think you girls should go down in it."

"I don't want to go in it, I just want to see the dead fish," Quiby said as to proclaim her independence. Banafrit rolled her eyes and started to say something when Quibilah grabbed Hasani's arm above his elbow with both hands and drew herself up close. Looking up at her friend, she begged with a puppy dog expression on her face, "Please?"

"We aren't going anywhere near it." Bana sternly said and grabbed Quibilah's arm to rescue Hasani from certain embarrassment.

Releasing her grip on Hasani Quiby said, "Ok, then let's go back to the house and wait on mom."

Bana had a huge smile on her face as she watched Quiby take the lead back to their house.

Hasani smiled back at Bana as they followed and said in a low tone to hide what he was saying from Quibilah, "I knew she didn't really want to go down there." Banafrut bumped his shoulder with hers and said, "Do ya think?" They both chuckled as they watched Quiby scurry in front of them.

Quibilah turned to see them taking their time and said, "Hasani, come on, let's find out what happened."

"Can you stay for lunch?" Bana questioned her friend to apologize for her sister's immature demand.

"I've got some time, it's still morning and I would really like to know what's going on too." he replied.

On the way up the path, Hasani tried to reason the rumors he had heard. "I've heard the Hebrews have some old slave who thinks he can stand up to the Pharaoh. I've even heard he thinks he can get the Pharaoh to give the slaves better working conditions."

Bana replied, "Yeah, dad told us he used to be the son of the previous Pharaoh. I don't understand how you can, 'used to be the son of someone' and why would the son of a Pharaoh be helping the slaves?"

"Yeah, I heard that too, and if that's true where has he been all this time. It doesn't add up." Hasani answers.

Quiby still maintaining a bouncing pace and not missing a step, turns her whole body around and pipes in, "Dad said the old guy used to be a sorcerer, but the Pharaoh's magician's fed him to the asps."

"Will it never end? Quiby, your mind has an amazing way of processing stories. I don't remember dad saying it quite that way," Banafrut said, trying to correct her sister.

"Thank you Bana, I like your mind too," and raising her voice finishes with, "but I think that is *exactly* how it happened." Quiby replied to show Bana she can hold her ground.

"You guys know how to keep it interesting, that's for sure," Hasani said, enjoying the bantering.

When the three of them got back to the house, Banafrut and Hasani started to fix their lunch while waiting for her mother to come home. Quibilah went to solicit any information she could find from her neighbors.

"Bana?" her mother's voice questioned as she came in the front door.

"Yes mother, Sani's here and we're almost done," Banafrut responded.

"I need to get back to your father. It seems everything is running late today." She said raising her voice with a touch of stress from her bedroom. As she walked into the open cooking area and saw Hasani, she stopped to say, "Hasani, where did you come from?"

"Mother," Bana, replied, "I told you when you came in, he was here."

"I'm sorry, your father has got me on edge with this massive wheel order of his and we are so far behind. I really only remember hearing your voice."

"It's ok mother Layla." Hasani tried to relieve her stress a bit. "Is there something I could do to help?"

"Mother," Banafrut interrupted with exasperation in her voice, "you haven't said a word about the water. You do know about the water don't you?"

"What Bana, what?" Layla turned her attention to her obviously strained daughter. "We all know you don't want to get..."

"Blood - mother - blood! Haven't you and father seen the water," Banafrut interrupted again raising her voice this time to point of dropping the tray she is holding.

"Blood! Where is Quibilah? Banafrit where is your sister?" All this stress made her thoughts go to her usually frantic daughter, "What do you mean blood?"

Hasani and Banafrit squatted down to pick up the tray of food. "She's ok mom. I don't know where she is." Bana looked at Hasani for a partial assurance.

Hasani responded with, "Don't look at me; I can't keep track of her when she's standing in front of me."

Layla started questioning Banafrit before Hasani finished, "You don't know where she is?" "What do you mean blood, Bana?"

Bana stood up while Hasani finished putting everything back on the tray. "Ok, ok, I'm sorry mom. It's been crazy for us this morning too. It's *looks* as though all the water everywhere has turned to blood." Her mother perched her eyebrows in wonderment as Bana finished. "I can't begin to tell you all the things we've seen this morning that is supposed to be water but it's not."

Layla replied, "Bana you sound like Quibilah. You're not making any sense."

Hasani rose up and setting the tray on the table said, "She's right Bana, you sound like Quibs."

"*SANI!*" Bana exclaimed putting her hands on her hips.

Flinching back and chuckling, Hasani turned to Layla and explained, "I'm major joking mother Layla. She's right; the water everywhere has turned to blood or something a heck of a lot like blood."

Bana ran out the back door as her mother yelled, "Bana, what are you doing."

Then in an instant they heard, "Open the door please!" Bana's voice rang from outside.

Both Hasani and Layla went to let Bana back in and found her holding the largest of the broken jar fragments from her earlier encounter with Quibilah. As Hasani opened the door, Banafrit came in holding the fragment with both hands. "Look mother, what do you think this liquid is in here?"

As Hasani closed the back door behind her, the front door flew open and Quibilah came storming in. Almost as though she knew they were all in the cooking area, Quibs came in talking a mile a minute. "Pharaoh is here. He is here in Qantir. Pharaoh's physicians had planned this thing with the water for months because the slaves' new king is from Midea and he's going to kill all of the Pharaoh's armies to take over the Pharaohs' government."

Layla briefly looked around when Quibilah first came in, but being very used to her ranting, she had learned to let Quibs finish. Hasani looked at Bana and smiled as Bana quizzed her mother, "Well, now you see?"

"Mother what are we going to do? Let's go get father." Quibilah could not let it go.

Ignoring Quibs completely, her mother looked up at Banafrit, raised her hand in a stopping motion and asked, "Bana you never make things up, what do you think of this?" Hasani smiled as he thought; 'Now I know where Bana gets that hand thing from.' Layla finished, "And don't tell me again this is blood."

"The entire inlet is this stuff," Hasani answered.

Banafrit stuck *her* hand in front of Quibilah's face knowing she could not help but respond. She then set the broken jar fragment on the table, turned her thumb down and dabbed some liquid on it. Rubbing her thumb and forefinger together, then separating the two and looking at the result, said, "Mother, tell me this isn't blood."

"Ooohh, you did not just touch it. No!" Quibilah could not take it anymore.

"It is not!" Layla responded. "Ok, enough. I do not have an answer, but we are going to need water. I will take this food to your father and check the inlet behind the shop. We *are* going to

need water here later, so you need to figure out how to accomplish that task Bana."

"I'll help you carry this to the shop mother Layla. I'd like to see what it's like over there too. I've been wondering that." Hasani said as he helped her gather the food.

"When does your mother get home Hasani?" Layla asked.

"It's almost dark when she arrives there." Quibilah answered. "I've been over there when it seemed she would never get home."

"I don't live far from your shop and I do have things I need to do at home before she gets there," Hasani replied.

"This will be good; I think I have an idea that will help us both Hasani." Layla said stacking her arms with bags. "We can talk along the way."

As Layla and Hasani walked out the door, Banafrit questioned her sister, "Where did you get that ridiculous story, 'he's going to take over the Pharaohs' government?' Sometimes I think we should feed *you* to the asps."

## Chapter 2: thank us '*Brews*' for returning your '*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, "Hasani says, "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.