

***The Moses Chronicles: Prelude  
(Book One of The Moses Chronicles)***

***by RR Wekesa***

***[FIRST TWO CHAPTERS]***



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***The Moses Chronicles: Prelude***

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This is a work of historical fiction. While based on biblical texts, all characters, dialogue, and events outside of the scriptural record are products of the author’s imagination and are used fictitiously.

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## Author's Note

This work is a tapestry woven from Scripture, history, and imagination. *The Moses Chronicles: Prelude* is rooted in the final chapters of Genesis, where Jacob blesses his sons and is laid to rest—and where the legacy of Joseph begins to fade into Egypt's shifting sands.

I have long been drawn to the quiet spaces in Scripture—the places between verses where hearts break, heal, and hope. This novel lives in that space. While I have taken creative liberties to flesh out relationships, timelines, and motivations, I have done so with great respect for the biblical narrative and Elohim who authored it.

You may encounter moments not explicitly found in Scripture—conversations, conflicts, and subplots born from historical research and prayerful reflection. These are offered not as doctrine, but as story: an invitation to walk alongside familiar names and see them not as distant figures, but as living, breathing people navigating covenant, culture, and calling.

This prelude sets the stage for the series ahead—a sweeping retelling of the Exodus journey: from palace to wilderness to promised land, from promise to slavery to freedom. It begins not with Moses, but with the community that raised him, the environment that birthed him... and the generations who carried hope before he ever drew breath.

Thank you for stepping into these ancient days with me.

— **RR Wekesa**

# Chapter 1: The Final Moments of Israel

## *Last Sunrise*

The hush of dawn settled over the camp, the cold breath of morning misting in the air. The rich scent of damp earth mixed with the lingering smoke from dying embers, curling softly beneath the heavy linen of Israel's tent. The stillness carried an unusual weight, an expectancy. It was as though creation itself was holding its breath.

Israel stirred in his bed, his once-mighty frame reduced to frailty, his breath shallow, yet his mind clear. He had lived long enough to see his children prosper in Egypt, long enough to witness the miraculous return of Joseph—his son whom he had once wept for, believing him dead. Yet, even as he lay in the land of Pharaoh, his heart longed for the land of his fathers, for the resting place of Abraham and Isaac.

He knew today was the day.

Zilpah had not yet come to help him rise. He waited, listening to the quiet, the absence of morning murmurs in the

household telling him that others, too, sensed that the time had come.

With slow, deliberate effort, he shifted his legs off the bed, wrapping a thick woolen garment around his thin shoulders. The air outside would be cool, but he longed to see the sun rise one last time. With great care, he shuffled toward the entrance of his tent, gripping the wooden post as he stepped outside.

The camp stretched before him in the dim light, the first streaks of gold creeping over the rooftops of his sons' dwellings. The homes, made of stone and dried mud, were sturdy, settled in the land that Pharaoh had given them. Smoke from early morning fires curled lazily into the sky, but the usual sounds of daily life—the laughter of children, the calls of servants, the clatter of clay pots—were absent. The camp was still.

Beyond them, standing in the distance like a reminder of a world both foreign and familiar, loomed the grandeur of the Egyptian palace. There, Joseph lived with his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, dressed in the fine linen of nobility.

Israel's thoughts drifted like the shifting sands.

Rachel—his beloved Rachel. The ache of losing her on the road to Ephrath still lingered in his bones. His heart clenched as

he remembered the nights of longing, the whispered prayers, the silent grief.

Leah. His steady Leah, whom he had buried in the land of his fathers. He had not loved her first, but she had borne him many sons, had stood by him through years of hardship. And Rachel, Rachel had fought for his love with everything she had, just as Leah had fought to keep him close. He chuckled, the sound dry as dust. He remembered their arguments, their rivalry — even the absurd exchange of mandrakes, the odd price at which he had once been ‘sold’ for a night.

Esau. His brother, his rival, the one he had deceived. Had Esau truly hated him? Or had the years softened their wounds? He thought of that day, that embrace, that moment of unspoken forgiveness.

The sound of quiet footsteps pulled him from his thoughts.

Zilpah.

She moved like a shadow, appearing beside him with a basin of warm water in her hands. Her face, lined with age, was set with a familiar look of quiet disapproval.

"Why are you up so early?" she asked, her voice carrying the sharpness of one who had cared for him for too long to be gentle.

Israel turned to her, his expression unreadable. "I must be ready," he murmured. "Gather my sons. Today, I go to my fathers."

Zilpah stiffened. The basin trembled in her hands, water sloshing over the edge. Her lips parted, as if to speak, but no words came. The shock in her dark eyes gave way to something deeper—uncertainty, fear.

For decades, she had served in this household, first as Leah's servant, then as a mother to his sons, Gad and Asher. But what would happen now? Who would care for her? She had borne him children, yet she was still a servant, a woman with no place among the tribes of Israel.

She swallowed hard, pushing her fears aside. Wordlessly, she helped him back into the tent, her hands steady as she led him to the back room where the lamp burned low. She would do what she had always done — she would prepare him.

The chamber was dim, the flickering light of oil lamps casting elongated shadows against the woven tapestries. The

scent of myrrh and frankincense clung to the air, mingling with the faint earthy musk of old rush mats.

One by one, Israel's sons entered, their heavy footfalls muffled against the layered rugs.

Reuben, firstborn, broad and solemn, stood at the head of the bed, his jaw set, his shoulders heavy with the weight of his father's past words.

#### The Final Blessing and the Passing of Israel

The chamber was heavy with silence, the only sound the flickering of oil lamps casting wavering shadows along the stone walls. Israel lay weak, his breath shallow, yet his spirit remained strong. His eyes, though dim with age, still held clarity, and though his movements were feeble, each one carried purpose.

This was a moment that could not be rushed, a proclamation that must be spoken before he was gathered to his fathers.

His sons stood in solemn attention, summoned for one final blessing.

## *A Father's Last Words*

Simeon and Levi stood side by side, their expressions unreadable. They had always moved as one, their bond forged in the blood of Shechem.

Judah stood tall, his presence grounded, as though he already bore the weight of leadership. The unspoken promise of kingship lingered in the room, though no words had yet been spoken.

The others followed—Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher—each carrying the weight of their father's final words.

Then came Joseph.

Draped in fine linen, his presence was unmistakable. He was no longer the boy thrown into the pit, no longer the slave in shackles. He was Zaphenath-paneah, second only to Pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt. Yet here, standing before his dying father, he was once again a son.

And beside him stood his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

They were the youngest in the room—not yet in their twenties—but they carried themselves with the quiet strength of

their father. They had been blessed once already, in private, just days before. Israel had drawn Joseph aside, laying hands upon them, declaring their inheritance among the sons of Israel.

But now, this was different.

Now, before all of his sons, Israel would speak the destiny of each one aloud.

His voice, though weakened by age, remained steady.

"Gather close," he murmured, his gaze moving over them all.

They obeyed, stepping nearer to the bedside. Near his feet, Dinah knelt, her fingers curled around his trembling hand. Silent tears slipped down her cheeks, though she made no sound.

Israel's gaze rested on Reuben first.

### *The Blessings of the Tribes*

**Reuben** – The Firstborn, But Not the Leader

*"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and power. But you are as unstable as water—you shall not have preeminence, because you defiled your father's bed."*

Reuben's head bowed, shame flickering in his eyes. His birthright was lost.

**Simeon and Levi** – The Brothers of Wrath

*"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul not come into their council, for in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."*

The room tensed. The massacre at Shechem had not been forgotten.

**Judah** – The Line of Kingship

Then, Israel's gaze fell upon Judah.

*"Judah, your brothers shall praise you. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow before you. Judah is a lion's cub. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes."*

A shift. A change in power.

Judah had been chosen.

**Zebulun** – The Merchant of the Sea

*"Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon."*

Zebulun's future would be tied to commerce and the sea.

**Issachar** – The Beast of Burden

*"Issachar is a strong donkey, lying between the sheepfolds. He saw that the land was good and rested his shoulder to bear the burden, submitting to forced labor."*

He would be strong but would serve others.

**Dan** – The Judge and the Serpent

*"Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward."*

Dan would bring justice but also danger.

**Gad** – The Warrior

*"Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels."*

Gad would be a fierce defender.

**Asher** – The Provider of Wealth

*"Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies."*

His tribe would be prosperous and provide for kings.

**Naphtali** – The Swift and Beautiful

*"Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns."*

A free spirit, swift and graceful.

### **Joseph – The Double Blessing**

Then, Israel turned to Joseph, and the tenderness in his eyes was unmistakable.

*"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring, whose branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely. But his bow remained strong, and the arms of his hands were made firm by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob."*

Joseph swallowed hard, gripping his father's frail hands. All the years of suffering, the betrayal, the pain—it had all led to this moment.

And then, Israel's gaze shifted to **Ephraim and Manasseh**.

Joseph's sons, no longer boys, but young men—young men who now stood as equals among their uncles.

Israel lifted a trembling hand, motioning for them to step forward.

*"Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are mine."*

A shift. A change in inheritance.

Reuben flinched, but he did not protest. He knew. He had known since the moment Joseph had risen in Egypt—his place was lost.

*"The blessings of your fathers shall surpass the blessings of the ancient mountains. The God of your father shall help you, and He shall bless you with blessings of the heavens above."*

It was done.

Ephraim and Manasseh had been fully counted among the tribes of Israel. Joseph had been given a double portion.

No one spoke. No one argued.

Israel exhaled, his body sinking into the linens. Slowly, he drew his feet up into the bed, his hands falling still upon his chest.

A single breath.

And then, he was gone.

## *The Weight of it All*

The silence was deafening.

Dinah's shoulders shook as she clutched his lifeless hand. Joseph closed his eyes, his lips pressing into a tight line as he reached for his father's still fingers.

His father—the man who had wrestled with God and prevailed—had breathed his last.

The son who had been lost had returned.

And now, he would bury his father with honor.

## Chapter 2: The Fractured Brotherhood

The silence was broken by a single cry.

Joseph, the son once lost and then found, collapsed onto his father's still form, his body wracked with sobs. It was not a quiet weeping but a raw, guttural wail that carried through the chamber, shaking the very walls of the tent. His hands clutched at Israel's linen robes, his face buried in his father's chest, as though holding on could somehow keep him from slipping away entirely.

The others stood motionless; their own grief heavy in their chests. But none could share this moment—not with Joseph, who had been denied so many years with his father, who had lived as an orphan while the rest of them carried on.

One by one, they slipped out of the room, their feet heavy against the woven rugs. Outside, the chill of the evening had settled in, but none moved toward their own homes. Instead, they lingered in the open courtyard, shifting uncomfortably, watching the entrance of the tent as though waiting for something—perhaps for grief itself to subside.

Joseph needed this time alone. It was only fair.

Near the doorway, Ephraim and Manasseh stood frozen, their youthful faces shadowed by flickering lamplight. They had never seen their father this way. Not once. He was always the Vizier, always composed, always strong.

Now, he was a grieving son.

The brothers wavered, unsure of what to do. Should they remain? Should they comfort him? They had never shed a tear before—not in public, not where anyone could see. To mourn as Hebrews mourned was foreign to them, but tonight, they cried. Not for themselves, but for the pain in their father’s eyes.

Dinah stepped beside them, her expression gentle. “Come,” she whispered. “Give him time.”

Manasseh clenched his jaw, his fingers curling into fists before he finally nodded. Ephraim exhaled slowly and turned to follow. Together, they walked toward the waiting chariot, their movements slow, reluctant.

They did not go home. Instead, they sat inside the carriage, waiting. They would not leave without their father.

The weight of the moment had not yet settled when Joseph finally emerged, his face drawn, his eyes red and shadowed. He

straightened his shoulders, pressing the sorrow deep into his chest, and addressed them.

“He will be embalmed,” he stated, his voice quiet but steady. “We will mourn for him here, but I will see to it that we take him to Machpelah, where he belongs.”

The brothers nodded, though unease flickered in their eyes. The land of their fathers lay far from Egypt—beyond the wealth and safety of Pharaoh’s lands. It was a journey that would not be simple.

Without another word, Joseph stepped into the chariot.

Ephraim and Manasseh sat stiffly on either side of him, stealing cautious glances his way. The silence stretched between them, heavy and unspoken. They had no words for this kind of loss. They had spent all their lives in Egypt, raised in palaces, educated among nobles. They had never known what it meant to lose the patriarch of a family—the father of an entire nation.

Finally, Ephraim broke the quiet.

“Father,” he murmured, his voice uncertain. “Will Elohim meet him in paradise?”

Joseph inhaled sharply, then turned to his son, his expression softening.

"Yes, my son," he answered, his voice gentler now. "He is already there."

### *A Night of Reflection*

As the chariot pulled up to the palace, the torches lining the entrance flickered against the polished limestone walls. The great stone columns towered above them, bathed in the warm glow of oil lamps. Even at this late hour, the air was filled with the distant sounds of servants moving about their tasks, the muffled murmurs of royal life continuing on.

At the top of the steps, Asenath waited.

She was not the most beautiful of Potiphera's daughters, but she was wise and kind, a woman whose quiet strength had anchored him through years of political duty. A devoted mother, a faithful wife. She had been chosen well by Pharaoh, not for beauty, but for her mind, for her steady presence.

As he stepped down, she embraced him.

He sighed into her shoulder, feeling the exhaustion settle deep in his bones. Ephraim and Manasseh quietly left the chariot and headed to their room.

Inside, the warmth of a fire flickered against the polished floors, casting long, wavering shadows against the walls. Asenath hurried to remove his heavy outer robe, her hands steady, but her eyes searching his. She did not ask, only waited, patient as always.

He sat on the edge of the bed, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "It is done," he murmured. "Father has gone to his rest."

She sat beside him, silent, waiting for him to continue.

Joseph let out a long breath. "I will need Pharaoh's permission to leave, to mourn, to bury him in Canaan. But... the weight of it all, Asenath—I feel like that young man again, lost in a prison cell, waiting on Elohim to guide my steps."

She reached for his hand, squeezing it gently. "Then you know what to do."

He nodded, whispering a quiet prayer into the stillness before allowing sleep to claim him.

### *Fire in the Village*

Back in the village, the night was far from over.

The brothers remained gathered outside Israel's tent, a fire crackling at the center of their circle. They did not speak at first. Each of them was lost in thought, sifting through their father's final words, feeling the weight of what had been spoken over them.

Israel had not simply blessed them. He had reshaped the future of their family.

Reuben and Simeon, the firstborn and second-born, had been set aside. Ephraim and Manasseh had taken their place.

The implications lingered, unspoken but felt.

Dinah sat just inside the tent, watching them from the shadows, her heart heavy with unspoken fears. What would become of her now? Israel's grace had been the only thing keeping her from complete exile. If they cast her out, would she plead for Joseph's mercy? He, at least, knew the wrath of their brothers. He understood how cold and unyielding they could be.

Benjamin was the first to break the silence. His voice was uncertain, hesitant. "Do you think Joseph will put us in slavery?"

Reuben turned sharply, flashing him a glare. But it was too late. The words had already shattered the fragile quiet, and the floodgates broke open.

Some of them scoffed, shaking their heads. Others murmured among themselves.

"Joseph would never," one insisted.

"He is second to Pharaoh," another countered. "He is more Egyptian than Hebrew now. His own children are foreigners. Why would he care about us?"

Reuben spat into the fire. "Father has left us no land to claim as our own. All we have is because of Joseph."

It was the truth, yet the words stung. It should have been his birthright, his inheritance to carry on. But instead, his name was barely a whisper in their father's final blessing.

Benjamin, his face tightening, snapped back, "Well, if you had stood up for him, things would be different."

A sharp breath.

Simeon and Levi moved before the words had fully settled, their anger immediate, instinctive—a force unchecked by reason. Like two lions responding to a challenge, they lunged at Benjamin, driving him back onto the ground.

Gad, the warrior, reacted just as fast. He threw himself between them, catching Levi's wrist before the blow could land. Simeon's fist glanced off Benjamin's shoulder, but before he

could strike again, Gad drove his forearm against Simeon's chest, forcing him back.

"Enough!" Gad growled, his strength alone holding the three apart.

The others scrambled, pulling them apart, shoving them away from one another as the fire crackled violently between them. The air smelled of sweat and dust, their ragged breathing filling the space left by their father's absence.

Judah's voice sliced through the chaos.

"This is not what Father would have wanted."

The fire cracked, its embers glowing red.

"There is nothing in Joseph's attitude toward us that should make us fear him," he continued.

Reuben, still kneeling in the dust, lifted his head. His voice was hoarse. "And yet, our places have been given to his sons."

The words hung in the air, and Simeon, bruised and breathless, let out a bitter laugh. "Isn't that the way of it? First, our father loved Joseph above all of us. And now, he has given our inheritance to his sons."

Levi wiped a streak of blood from his lip, his voice laced with frustration. "We were born of Israel's house, and yet two Egyptian boys now stand before us."

Judah inhaled sharply but did not speak. The tension simmered.

Zebulun, always the diplomat, shook his head. "The blessing is done. Nothing we say can change it."

Gad exhaled. "But what does it mean for us?"

Naphtali muttered, "It means Reuben and Simeon have lost their birthright. It means Ephraim and Manasseh will now stand as our elders, though they were raised outside our ways."

There was silence. It was true, and it stung.

Reuben sat back on his heels, shaking his head. His voice was raw. "Joseph honors our father. He would not harm us, I know this, but still—" he trailed off, his hands pressing against his temples. "What do we say to him? How do we even begin?"

Issachar, who had remained quiet, exhaled through his nose, his mind working through the words carefully. "We must acknowledge the wrong we did. If we do not, it will always remain between us."

Reuben swallowed. "Then tell him..." he struggled, rubbing a hand down his face, his fingers shaking slightly. "Tell him that Father left instructions before he died—"

Issachar's voice was firmer. "Tell him that we ask for his forgiveness, that he would not hold against us the wrongs we committed against him. Not for our sake, but for the sake of the God of our father."

A hush fell over them.

Yes. That was the right message.

The fire popped, sending a small spark into the air.

Simeon, glancing around, finally asked, "Who will take the message?"

From the entrance of the tent, Dinah stepped forward, her voice quiet but firm.

"I will go."

## *Burden of the Blessings*

The breakfast chamber was filled with the comforting aromas of warm goat's milk, honeyed bread, and fresh figs. Ephraim and Manasseh sat at the long table, their expressions subdued, their usual eagerness dampened by the weight of the past few days.

Asenath, seated across from them, watched them carefully as she placed a piece of fruit on her plate. The boys were not children anymore. Teenagers now, standing on the cusp of manhood, but yesterday—yesterday had changed everything.

Manasseh broke the silence first, pushing his food around with his fingers. "I've never seen Father like that before." His voice was quiet, hesitant.

Ephraim nodded, exhaling. "Neither have I." He looked up, eyes dark with something unspoken. "He wept, Mother. I didn't know he could."

Asenath's heart clenched. They had grown up seeing their father as unshakable, always in control, always composed. The Vizier of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

But yesterday, they had not seen the Vizier. They had seen a son mourning his father.

She reached for her cup, choosing her words carefully. “He loved Israel very much,” she said. “Losing him after all these years... it was not the same as when he lost him the first time, but the grief is no less real.”

Ephraim leaned forward, his fingers drumming against the polished wood. “And then the blessing—before all of them.” He glanced at his brother. “That was terrifying.”

Manasseh frowned. “Did you see the way Uncle Reuben looked at us? And Simeon?”

Asenath did not answer right away. She could only imagine it.

The tension, the unspoken resentment. The shifting of power.

Ephraim and Manasseh had always known they were different. They had grown up in palaces, not tents. They had been taught Egyptian philosophy, politics, and warfare—yet their father always spoke of Elohim, of the people he came from.

But yesterday, everything had changed.

Yesterday, in front of all their uncles, their grandfather had spoken the words that had forever altered their place in the family.

*"Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are mine."*

They had replaced their father's elder brothers.

Manasseh's fingers tightened around his cup. "I don't know if I want that."

Asenath looked between them, feeling the weight of their uncertainty.

"Did you not want the blessing?" she asked carefully.

Manasseh looked down, his jaw tense. "I don't know. I just—" He hesitated. "We don't even know them. Not really."

Ephraim exhaled, shaking his head. "I always thought of them as Father's brothers. But now... they're supposed to be our brothers." He scoffed, the uncertainty in his voice betraying his true feelings. "And we are supposed to lead them?"

Asenath reached across the table, resting a hand on Ephraim's. "You are not expected to lead them today," she said gently. "But one day, you will stand as elders among them. And you must decide what kind of men you will be."

Ephraim and Manasseh exchanged glances.

Manasseh exhaled slowly. “They don’t trust us.”

“No,” Asenath admitted. “Not yet.”

Just then, Joseph entered.

The boys straightened instinctively as their father approached, his steps measured, his expression still carrying the weight of mourning but softened by the presence of his family.

He met Asenath’s gaze briefly before sitting down at the head of the table. A servant immediately stepped forward to fill his cup.

Joseph took a sip, then glanced at his sons. “You’re quiet this morning.”

Ephraim and Manasseh hesitated. Then Manasseh spoke. “We were talking about yesterday. About Grandfather’s blessing.”

Joseph’s gaze sharpened, but he remained still. “And?”

Manasseh hesitated, then shook his head. “We don’t know what it means for us.”

Ephraim met his father’s eyes. “They were angry.”

Joseph studied them for a long moment, setting his cup down carefully. “Yes,” he admitted. “Some of them were.”

A moment of silence.

“I don’t think I want this,” Manasseh admitted, his voice quiet but firm. “I don’t know how to be one of them.”

Joseph exhaled, leaning forward. “I understand.”

He saw the weight pressing down on his sons, the uncertainty, the fear of stepping into a role they had not asked for.

Slowly, he reached for his cup again, turning it in his hands. “When I was your age,” he said, “I did not know how to be a brother either.”

Ephraim frowned. “What do you mean?”

Joseph met his gaze. “I had dreams,” he said, his voice steady. “Dreams that I would one day rise above my brothers. I did not ask for those dreams. I did not want to be set apart. But Elohim had already chosen my path.”

The room was quiet.

Joseph continued, his voice gentle. “When my brothers sold me into slavery, I thought I had lost my place in the family forever.” He looked at them both carefully. “But Elohim never lost sight of me. And He has not lost sight of you.”

Ephraim and Manasseh exchanged glances.

Joseph reached for his son's wrist, gripping it gently. "Do not fear this blessing," he said. "It is an honor, not a burden."

Ephraim exhaled, his fingers tapping against the table. "I still don't know how to lead them."

Joseph smiled slightly. "Then learn," he said simply. "Watch them. Listen. Speak only when necessary. Leadership is not about standing above them—it is about knowing when to stand beside them."

Manasseh exhaled, looking down at his hands.

Asenath, watching them all carefully, finally spoke. "You are still young. No one expects you to know everything now."

Joseph nodded. "But one day, when the time comes, you will be ready."

Ephraim and Manasseh still looked unsure, but the weight on their shoulders seemed lighter.

A knock at the door interrupted the moment, and a servant stepped inside.

"My lord," the man bowed, addressing Joseph. "Pharaoh has been informed that you will seek an audience. You may come when you are ready."

Joseph nodded. "Thank you."

The servant withdrew.

Joseph turned back to his sons. “It’s time for you both to go to your lessons,” he said.

Ephraim opened his mouth as if to protest, then thought better of it. Manasseh sighed but stood.

Asenath watched as the boys reluctantly rose from the table. Ephraim lingered a moment longer before nodding at Joseph.

“Thank you, Father,” he said, his voice quiet.

Joseph nodded in return.

They departed, leaving Joseph and Asenath alone.

She studied him for a moment before finally saying, “You did well.”

He let out a long breath, rubbing his temples. “I pray it will be enough.”

Asenath reached for his hand. “It will be.”

For now, it was all they could do.

And then, Joseph stood, his mind shifting from his sons to the duty ahead.

It was time to go to Pharaoh.

## *The Back Hallway*

The palace grounds stirred with the quiet hum of dawn. Servants swept the courtyards, the rhythmic scrape of reeds against stone blending with the faint murmur of scribes exchanging morning reports. A pair of guards passed by, their sandals tapping against the marble as they changed shifts. Beyond them, the towering palace walls bore the unyielding gaze of gods and kings, their painted faces frozen in eternal watchfulness.

Joseph did not take the main hall.

He could not.

Not today.

His mourning robe—unadorned, its hem still stained with dust from the night before—was at odds with the brilliance of Pharaoh’s court. His hair, uncombed, hung loosely over his shoulders, a stark departure from the polished state required of a royal official. The customs of Egypt forbade grief in the presence of the divine ruler. No man in mourning could stand before Pharaoh, lest sorrow mar the sacred order of Ma’at.

So Joseph slipped through the lesser halls, his path weaving through the shadowed corridors few men of his rank ever walked.

Here, the world was quieter. The air cooler. The footfalls of the palace echoing in solitude. The torchlight flickered against the smooth stone, casting elongated shadows that bent and stretched like silent watchers.

A passageway branched off to the right, a familiar one. It led to the rear of the throne hall—an entrance reserved for high officials and royal kin who sought private counsel.

Joseph pressed his hand to the cool frame of the doorway before stepping inside.

### *Confrontation with Nefer-Ra*

The chamber was dim, its walls adorned with muted murals of Pharaoh's conquests, their once-vibrant hues softened by age and flickering lamplight. A thick woven rug covered the floor, its fibers worn beneath the weight of those who had waited here before him—generals, scribes, noblemen.

Joseph sank onto a low bench, but the comfort of the cushions did nothing to ease the heaviness in his chest.

His father was gone.

The weight of mourning pressed upon him, but there was no time to be consumed by it. He had come to petition Pharaoh for permission to bury his father in the land of his ancestors.

But he would not see Pharaoh today.

Custom dictated that Pharaoh could not look upon one in mourning—it was a sign of impurity. Instead, it would be the high priests who would receive him, standing as intermediaries between Joseph and the throne.

Joseph exhaled, his jaw tightening. That meant dealing with Nefer-Ra, the High Priest of Amun.

There were few men in Egypt who dared to show him open hostility, but among them, the priests stood at the forefront. Ever since he had interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, the magicians of the court had regarded him with contempt. Joseph had proven them to be powerless. He had done in moments what they, with all their spells and secret arts, had failed to do. His rise had been swift, and though Pharaoh favored him, the priests had never forgotten how he had humiliated them.

A rustling at the entrance made him lift his head.

Nefer-Ra entered, his robes flowing in heavy folds of white and gold, the sacred leopard-skin mantle of his office draped over one shoulder. His kohl-rimmed eyes, sharp and unreadable, locked onto Joseph's with the calculating gaze of a man who carried centuries of tradition in his blood.

For a moment, neither spoke.

Then, in a voice smooth as polished stone, Nefer-Ra broke the silence.

"Joseph, Vizier of Egypt," he intoned, his words measured, deliberate. "Why have you come before the gods in mourning?"

Joseph recognized the slight at once. He was not in the presence of the gods—he was in the presence of men. But Nefer-Ra, like all the high priests before him, considered himself more than a mere servant of the divine.

Joseph did not rise to the insult. This was not the time or place to start a fight.

"I come on behalf of my father," he said, his voice calm. "I seek Pharaoh's permission to take him home, to the land of Canaan, to bury him in the tomb of our ancestors."

Nefer-Ra studied him, his expression unreadable. Then, ever so slightly, he smiled.

"Pharaoh has already spoken," he said smoothly. "The mourning for your father will last seventy days, as is custom. It would be improper to hasten the process. Would your father not be honored to receive the burial rites of Egypt?"

The words were careful, laced with hidden meaning. Joseph knew this game well. They were testing him.

"It is not our way," he replied evenly. "My father gave me his final command, and I intend to see it fulfilled."

Nefer-Ra watched him for a long moment, then inclined his head.

"Very well," he said. "I will take your request to Pharaoh. You will have your answer soon."

Joseph bowed his head slightly but did not look away. He could see the disdain in the priest's eyes, the cold amusement lurking beneath his carefully measured expression. But this was neither the time nor the place to confront him.

Nefer-Ra turned and left the chamber, his robes trailing behind him like the shadow of a vulture.

## *The Gathering of the Magicians*

Nefer-Ra stepped into the inner halls of the temple, where the flickering torchlight cast wavering shadows across the sacred pillars. Several priests, their robes pristine and their expressions solemn, gathered as he entered.

"The Hebrew seeks permission to bury his father," Nefer-Ra said smoothly, his voice carrying through the dim chamber. "Pharaoh will allow it."

The murmurs of the priests rose at once.

"Let him go," one said. "He will leave, and in time, he will fade from Pharaoh's favor."

Nefer-Ra's gaze flickered to him, cold and sharp. "No," he said. "If he leaves, he must not return."

A hush fell over the room.

"He has ruled too long," another priest muttered. "The people seek his judgment over ours. He is a Hebrew, and yet Pharaoh calls him his own. We should have ended his influence years ago."

"We shall correct that mistake," Nefer-Ra said.

There was a long silence before one of the younger priests stepped forward hesitantly. "Here, within Pharaoh's walls, he is untouchable. But if he journeys beyond—"

Nefer-Ra's lips curled into a slow, deliberate smile. "Yes. Outside of Egypt, on the road to his father's tomb, he will not have Pharaoh's hand to protect him. He will be vulnerable. The wilderness is treacherous. Accidents happen. An arrow, a stray blade, a fall from his chariot—"

"The desert does not return the dead," one of the priests murmured.

Nefer-Ra inclined his head. "Exactly."

A ripple of approval passed through the gathered priests. The plan was set.

They would allow him to leave. But he would never return.

### *Permission Secured*

Back in the waiting chamber, Joseph sat in silence. His mind was weary, the grief still fresh, but he knew he would have his answer soon.

A servant entered, bowing low. "My lord, the High Priest has confirmed your petition with Pharaoh. You may return home."

Joseph nodded and stood. He could still feel the weight of Nefer-Ra's gaze, the thinly veiled disdain behind his words. There was something about the exchange that unsettled him, though he could not yet place why.

Still, this was no time for suspicion.

He turned and left the chamber, stepping into the open air where his chariot awaited him.

The road to Machpelah had been secured. His father would be buried with honor.

And in the shadows of the temple, unseen hands moved into place, ready to strike.

### *The Taking of Israel's Body*

The tent was heavy with grief. Ashes dusted the ground where Jacob's sons sat, their garments torn, their faces streaked with sorrow. Outside, the wailing of women carried on the desert

wind, mourning for the great patriarch who had led them, who had once wrestled with God Himself.

Inside, Reuben sat rigid, his fingers clenched into the fabric of his torn robe. The others—Judah, Levi, Simeon, and the rest—spoke in murmurs, their voices laced with disbelief, with sorrow, and with something deeper. Something unspoken.

Near the entrance, Zilpah, the quiet servant who had once been Leah's handmaid, stood still, her hands folded before her. Beside her, Dinah remained silent, her eyes fixed on the body of her father.

Then, the priests came.

Their arrival was marked by a hush, a subtle shifting of weight as the brothers turned their heads. The Egyptians, clad in their pristine white linen, walked with measured steps. Their golden collars and bald heads gleamed in the dim light of the mourning tent, their expressions neutral but respectful.

Reuben stood swiftly, his grief sharpening into anger. "What are they doing here?" His voice cut through the silence, rough as a blade.

One of the priests, an older man with deep-set eyes, bowed slightly before speaking. "We come on the orders of the Grand Vizier, your brother Joseph."

The name was like a stone dropped into a still pond. A tension rippled through the tent.

"We have been sent to prepare your father's body according to the rites of Egypt," the priest continued. "Your brother has commanded that he be honored as a great one among us."

Reuben's jaw clenched. He glanced at his brothers, but it was Judah who spoke next. "This is not our way."

"It is the way of kings," the priest countered, his tone gentle, as if speaking to a grieving child. "Joseph has given his command."

The brothers were silent. What could they say? Joseph had the Pharaoh's ear. He had saved them from famine, given them a home in Egypt. How could they deny him this final tribute to their father?

And yet, it was not their custom.

Finally, Levi exhaled sharply. "Take him, then."

The priests moved forward with reverence, their hands precise as they lifted Jacob's body onto a linen-draped bier.

Dinah watched without a word. Her face revealed nothing, but her fingers curled slightly at her sides. Zilpah, too, remained still, though a quiet sadness touched her aged features.

As the Egyptians carried Jacob away, disappearing into the golden light beyond the tent's opening, the brothers sat back down. Their father was gone.

"This is not how it should be," Naphtali muttered.

"As if he were an Egyptian," Dan added, shaking his head.

"He will not remain in their land," Judah said firmly.

"Joseph swore to us that he will bring our father back to Canaan."

The murmurs of agreement were subdued, laced with uncertainty.

Reuben looked down at the ashes on his hands. "Our father should have remained here with us until burial. But now he lies among foreigners."

"He is not with them," Levi murmured. "He is with our ancestors. With Abraham. With Isaac. His soul is not in Egypt."

The brothers fell into silence once more. Outside, the sound of Egyptian chants drifted through the air, a foreign rhythm to ears that had only ever known the prayers of their fathers.

Zilpah turned to Dinah and, for the first time, spoke. “Even when you belong to two peoples, death will always remind you where you came from.”

Dinah said nothing. But she did not look away.



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