



THE EGYPTIAN  CHRONICLES

IN FEAST OR FAMINE

SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

UNCORRECTED
PROOF

A Novel

MESU ANDREWS

AUTHOR OF POTIPHAR'S WIFE

IN FEAST OR FAMINE

A Novel

THE EGYPTIAN CHRONICLES

Mesu Andrews



WATERBROOK

IN FEAST OR FAMINE

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In Feast or Famine is a work of historical fiction based closely on real people and real events. Details that cannot be historically verified are purely products of the author’s imagination.

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To Lissa Halls-Johnson, my precious friend and tenacious writing partner. You see my words at their worst and then help shape them into a pleasing offering to our God. “Thank you” is never enough.

NOTE TO READER

Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh.

GENESIS 41:45–46

From Broadway to children's books, the biblical story of Joseph, his colorful coat, and his rags-to-riches journey in Egypt has fascinated people of all ages. But most of the focus remains on Joseph and his brothers, their reunion, and the overwhelming forgiveness he musters for the family who betrayed him. Granted, it's a great testimony of integrity and grace. But what about his wife? Have you ever wondered how Joseph, a man so committed to Elohim, could remain faithful to his God and offer such grace while married to Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On (see Genesis 41:45)? And why did Pharaoh choose this woman to marry his second highest official—the “savior” of Egypt?

Before we can understand the heights to which Joseph rose, we must understand the mountain he climbed. After studying the political climate in which Joseph navigated his years of leadership

[x] NOTE TO READER

during both feast and famine, I believe Asenath and her priestly father were as perilous to Joseph's climb as were the years he spent in prison.

I also believe his wife may have become one of his greatest blessings. Why? I've used historical findings to build on the truth of Genesis 40–50, then used creative fiction as mortar to create Joseph and Asenath's world. Come. Experience ancient Egypt and meet a woman too few have ever considered.

THE GREAT SEA

NILE DELTA

LOWER
EGYPT

MEMPHIS

FAIYUM

MAGIC LAKE

SHEDET
HAWARA
GUROB PALACE
TEBTUNIS

BAR
YUSEF

AVARIS

BUBASTIS

ON

MEYDUM

UPPER
EGYPT

ABYDOS

THEBES

NEKHEN

EDFU FORTRESS

CUSH



CHARACTERS

Ahira	Hebrew maid; Joseph's first love; Pushpa's assistant cook
Apophis	co-regent of Lower Egypt with Pharaoh Yanassi; Queen Tani's brother
Asenath	Potiphera's daughter; priestess; Isis Incarnate; Joseph's wife
Esi	Asenath's maid
Fadil	old Ra priest in Memphis
Hami	vizier until he is assigned to be captain of the guard for Zaphenath- Paneah (Joseph)
Hodari	captain of the guard for Pharaoh Yanassi
Hotep	Asenath's cautious, introverted handmaid; becomes King Apophis's wife/queen
Jendayi	Asenath's guenon monkey (female)
Joseph/Zaphenath-Paneah	vizier of Egypt; Asenath's husband
Katesch	chantress known as the Songbird of Memphis; beloved deceased wife of Potiphera

Maahir	Vizier Paneah's steward
Medjays	Cushite warriors who serve as bodyguards for Egypt's high-ranking officials
Mentuhotepi	Queen Sitmut's firstborn son; half brother of Neferhotep; a madman
Nebiriraw	one of Upper Egypt's pharaohs
Neferhotep	young son of Queen Sitmut and Pharaoh Sobekhotep; half brother of Mentuhotepi
Nuru	captain of On's temple guard; Potiphera's bodyguard and faithful spy
Potiphar	captain of the guard for King Apophis
Potiphera/Potabi	high priest of Ra (later Amun-Ra); father of Asenath
Pushpa	"Omni" to Pharaoh Khyan and Potiphar; chief cook for Apophis's army
Shu	Shedet's high priest
Sitmut	scarred wife of Pharaoh Sobekhotep; mother of Neferhotep and Mentuhotepi
Sobekhotep	Queen Sitmut's husband and brother; Neferhotep's father; Mentuhotepi's stepfather
Tani	Pharaoh Khyan's widow; Pharaoh Yanassi's mother; Pharaoh Apophis's sister
Tau	Potiphera's steward
Ubaid	warden of the prison underneath Potiphar's villa

Yanassi	co-regent of Lower Egypt with Pharaoh Apophis; Queen Tani's son
Zahra	Asenath's bubbly, bold, adventurous, and outspoken handmaid

A captain of the guard is assigned to each person of high importance. There are three who play a role in this story: one for each of the co-regents—Yanassi [Hodari] and Apophis [Potiphar]—and one for the vizier [Hami].

GLOSSARY

ABBA	(Hebrew) father
ABI	(Egyptian) father
AKH	a spirit or ghost
AMU	Egyptian term for Canaanites or those from Canaanite ancestry
BARQUE	a large, flat-bottomed ship made for navigating the Nile
BAHR YUSEF	River of Joseph
CHANTRESS	a woman who served in the temple; though their duties were unclear, chantresses of Amun were highly esteemed
EYE OF HORUS	a symbol derived from a mythical conflict between the gods Horus and Seth and used in art and cosmetics to signify well-being, healing, and protection
FAIENCE	earthenware embellished with opaque colored glazes

FAIYUM	an area of varied topography in northern Egypt, west of the Nile, watered by a channel initially constructed by Pharaoh Amenemhat-Nubkaura
FELUCCA	sturdy reed or wooden boats with triangular sails
GIDETY	(Egyptian) grandmother
GIDY	(Egyptian) grandfather
GREAT-SABA	(Hebrew) great-grandfather
GREAT-SAVTA	(Hebrew) great-grandmother
HIGH PRIEST	the highest-ranking priest of a particular temple who held authority over all his priests
HYKSOS	Amorite tribes that Bedouins forced from Canaan and that were relocated to Egypt; from approximately 1800 to 1550 B.C. they rose to a ruling dynasty
IMA	(Hebrew) mother
INUNDATION	ancient Egypt's first of three seasons; marked the new year with the akhet festival and measuring the Nile's floodwaters
ISIS	Egyptian goddess of healing, rebirth, and motherhood
KA	a person's soul
LECTOR PRIEST	second to the high priest; his responsibilities included instructing other clergy and maintaining and reading from the sacred writings during festivals and sacrifices

MA'AT	describes both the ancient Egyptian goddess of truth, justice, harmony, and peace (Ma'at) and the goal of every human to achieve those qualities in daily life
MAMMISI	the place in a temple where the goddess would give birth to the son of the god
OMMI	(Egyptian) Mother
PHYLE	a month-long term that gave community members the opportunity to serve as priests (and priestesses)
PROPHET	the administrative priest in a temple
SABA	(Hebrew) grandfather
SCHENTI	a single strip of linen wrapped around the hips and secured with a belt
SENET	an ancient Egyptian board game
SOBEK	Egyptian god associated with a crocodile; manifested as a crocodile or man with a crocodile head
VIZIER	a vice-regent; second to the Egyptian king or pharaoh
WAB PRIEST	the lowest order of temple servants who performed the most mundane tasks with little recognition or reward

Abundance doesn't always come with feasting—nor
famine in times of drought.

PROLOGUE

So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. . . .

“This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. . . . “Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do. . . . But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.”

GENESIS 40:9, 12–14

AVARIS, LOWER EGYPT

CIRCA 1693 B.C.

Ahira

I was a prisoner of time, awaiting word of a baker’s death, a cupbearer’s favor, and Joseph’s release.

My handsome husband-to-be emerged from the cell he was cleaning. “You must let me leave the prison, Joseph, just long enough to ensure the cupbearer honors his promise.”

He took the broom from my hands and drew me close. “Are you trying to shirk your duties, Ahira bat Enoch?”

How could a man clean filthy cells all morning and still smell of

cloves and honey? “You make my head swim,” I whispered.

“Will you be so enamored when I am your husband?” He raised a single brow, mischief in the challenge. “Because I plan to make you my wife the moment I’m freed.”

I nodded toward the torture tables behind me. “I’m not sure you can outshine these romantic surroundings once you’re free, but I’m anxious to see you try.”

His laughter was pure joy and ended with a tender kiss. We’d waited nearly four years for Elohim to right the injustices done to my beloved. After an especially dark series of events, Master Potiphar’s wife had accused Joseph of attempted rape. Though the master knew his wife had lied, he imprisoned Joseph and kept the whole matter secret from Pharaoh Khyan—adding another brick to the wall between our master and the king, his childhood friend. If the cupbearer revealed Joseph’s imprisonment, would Potiphar be angry? Would Pharaoh? Would Joseph be forgotten in a renewed battle between the two most powerful men in Lower Egypt?

“Joseph, I—” Pleading, I looked up. “Let me go upstairs. I’ll slip quietly into the throne room and see what’s taking so long. If the cupbearer mentioned you as he promised, Pharaoh should have sent someone to free you by now.”

“They’ll come.” He tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. “Elohim gave the dreams, gave me the interpretations, and arranged the timing of today’s feast. It’s all too perfect not to happen.”

But the slight tremor in his smile told me he was nervous, too. I laid my head against his chest and heard the pounding of his heart. *Elohim, please let our hopes become reality!*

Two Medjays had come at dawn to escort the chosen prisoners upstairs, just after I’d arrived with Pushpa’s basket of food for Joseph and the warden, Ubaid, to break their fast. The water clock had run out long ago, and our bellies confirmed it was well past midday. When I was chosen as the freedom prisoner years ago—in celebration of both Pharaoh’s birth and Inundation, the Nile’s annual rebirth—I’d been presented to Pharaoh and finished the feast and parade by early afternoon.

“I must go!” I broke away, nearly knocking over the prison warden in my mad dash toward the stairs.

“Don’t run off on my account!” he called up the steps, cackling. “I finished my nap and hoped for a game of senet.”

“Later, Ubaid!” I shouted. Reaching the ground floor landing, I darted through the villa door and closed it behind me. The hallway was deserted, and the sounds of distant screams sent gooseflesh over my body. Panic launched me toward the kitchen across the hall. *Empty.* Pushpa, my dearest friend and the master’s ommi, must have gone to the throne room for the festivities.

My legs turned to water as distant sounds of turmoil grew. Shrieks surrounded the villa from all sides—the kitchen courtyards and even from the streets beyond the palace walls. I had to find Pushpa. She’d likely be among the nobility in the throne room. Though she hated the pomp, she endured it to be with her sons. She’d adopted Pharaoh Khyan and Captain Potiphar when they were merely boys, having no idea they’d one day rule the nation.

I burst into the hallway and raced through the dining room and into the walkway connecting the palace to my master’s home. When I was barely halfway to the entrance, the throne room’s door flung wide. Two Medjays flanked hysterical Pushpa, her grief at full volume.

“Ahira!” she cried when she spotted me. The warriors released her, and she ran into my arms, sobbing incoherent news. I looked over her shoulder for an interpretation.

“Pharaoh Khyan is dead,” Hami said without conciliation. Though he’d been Egypt’s vizier for years, he dealt with urgency like the impassive Medjay he once was. “We cleared the throne room as soon as the king fell, but panic at his death will be seen as an ill omen for this year’s akhet festival and will spread like a plague. Take Mistress Pushpa to her chamber and wait there for Captain Potiphar. Go. Now.” Though never unkind, Hami always put duty before courtesy.

Pushpa looped her arm in mine and started without dispute. “Pharaoh’s death changes everything. When power shifts in Egypt,

the wise remain close to the truest of heart.”

Of course, we would gain a new pharaoh, but . . . “What do you mean ‘it changes everything?’”

“General Apophis immediately assumed Khyan died from poisoning and accused Potiphar of lagging in his protection. In Potiphar’s defense, Queen Tani affirmed Khyan had complained of chest pains for two weeks but wouldn’t let anyone call for his physicians. Had she not spoken on his behalf, I might have lost both my sons this day.”

“Oh, Pushpa, I’m so sorry.” Always horrified at Egyptian politics, I silently praised Elohim I was but a slave.

She glanced over her shoulder. The Medjays had returned to the throne room. We were alone in the connecting hall, but she still whispered, “The queen’s gracious act was followed almost immediately by a foolish one. She appointed Apophis as her son’s co-regent.”

“How can the queen appoint the next king—and a six-year-old pharaoh?”

She shushed me as we entered the villa. “Tani is well respected by Khyan’s counselors. They won’t challenge the grieving widow when she appoints her own brother to rule alongside her son. But Apophis has always been ambitious. Placing him on the throne beside Yanassi is inviting conspiracy.”

“He wouldn’t kill his own nephew . . . would he?”

“I don’t know. But anything’s possible when a man hungry for power catches its scent. Potiphar has never trusted General Apo—I suppose *King Apophis* is more appropriate now.”

We entered the villa’s residence hall in silence, my mind whirring with how to broach the subject of Joseph’s release. Before we reached the kitchen, I whispered, “Perhaps Joseph could be released now that . . .” The horror on Pushpa’s face bowed my head in shame. How callous of me to think of Joseph’s release when our pharaoh had died only moments ago.

“I know it seems unfair that Potiphar sent Joseph to prison, but you must realize that if Khyan believed Potiphar deceived him in even the smallest detail, it would have been reason for dismissal—or

even execution. Potiphar risked his life to return Zuleika to Crete, and Joseph is well cared for in the prison as Ubaid's assistant. You two will be married someday, but—" Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked away.

We'd avoided this topic for three years. I hadn't even told her that Joseph interpreted the cupbearer's and baker's dreams, fearing she might warn Master Potiphar and somehow ruin Joseph's chance to be free. But with Pharaoh Khyan dead, there was no reason to keep Joseph hidden.

"Did Pharaoh Khyan restore the cupbearer to his position before he died?" I asked.

Pushpa's brow wrinkled. "He did. And he chose a second freedom prisoner—the baker—but deemed him unworthy for some reason. It was so strange. The moment after Khyan ordered the royal baker taken away and hanged, Khyan fell to his knees and grasped his chest." Her face twisted with emotion. "Potiphar ordered his guards to surround Khyan, but how could they hide a giant? Everyone in the courtroom saw their god-king gasp for his last breath before clearing the courtroom. When people are frightened, they become unpredictable—"

I pulled Pushpa into my arms to hide my devastation. *The cupbearer didn't have time to mention Joseph.* "For safety's sake, we should remain inside the villa, or ask Hodari to escort us."

She broke away. "We're leaving Avaris. Pack what you can carry in a shoulder bag."

The floor felt as if it had shifted. "Why?" I could barely form the word.

"Queen Tani appointed Potiphar to the position of captain of King Apophis's bodyguard. She reasoned that spending all day every day with her brother would relieve Potiphar's misgivings about his character." Pushpa scoffed. "King Apophis revealed his character with his first act as co-regent. He plans to march Lower Egypt's troops into our southern nomes and quash any rebellion that stirs when news of Khyan's death travels." She gripped my shoulders. "Remember what I said, Ahira. When Egypt's power shifts, the wise

remain close to the truest of heart. My Potiphar is the truest heart I know. We leave at dawn with him and his regiment of Medjays who will guard King Apophis. We will be the official cooks for the king and his royal guards.”

“No!” I shrugged her off. “I can’t leave Joseph!”

She stared at me, utterly calm. “We can, and we must. I love Joseph, too. You know I do. But he is safer in that prison than we are in these halls. Khyan’s death will ripple conflict throughout Egypt, and it will begin here in Avaris—the likes of which you can’t imagine, my sweet Hebrew. In every nome, in Abydos, and even farther south—in Upper Egypt—pure-blooded Egyptians will see Khyan’s death as an opportunity to advance north and seize his throne. Coups and conspiracies will bloom like lotus at dawn. Rebels will separate the Egyptians from so-called Hyksos—the dividing lines Khyan worked so hard to erase.”

“If we must leave, then ask Master Potiphar to release Joseph. Take him with us. We can’t abandon him—”

“No!” she shouted. Her sudden harshness sobered me. She raised her chin and straightened her shoulders. “I’m the cook for Potiphar’s royal guard, and you’re my assistant. We have much to prepare. Visit Joseph if you must, but be quick with your goodbye.” Her chin quivered slightly, the lone crack in her unfeeling demeanor. “You must believe me. Joseph is safe. And he’ll be exactly where we left him when we return.”

IN FEAST OR FAMINE

ONE

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

LEVITICUS 19:34

ON, LOWER EGYPT

TWENTY-THREE MONTHS LATER

Asenath

If raising a monkey was intended to train me as the Great Ommi of Egypt, I was failing miserably. “Jendayi, naughty girl. Give me that mirror!” I lunged at my furry-faced guenon as she scurried up the slanted branch in her corner of my audience chamber. She was the size of a water pitcher, and her brown speckled fur was softer than lamb’s wool. She was the joy of my life but as unruly as a spoiled child.

“I’ll get the mirror this time.” Zahra, my adventurous handmaid, raced after her. Jendayi scampered up more dead branches, with a squeal like laughter, then settled into her favorite hiding place. Potabi had constructed a web of hemp ropes like vines hanging from my gilded ceiling. My mischievous monkey had picked off nearly all the gold sheeting, exposing the limestone blocks of my

tower's ceiling.

"Be careful, Zahra." Hotep chewed her nails. "Don't corner her. She'll bite you."

Instantly defensive, I glared at my overly cautious maid. "Jendayi doesn't bite."

Hotep glared back at me and pointed to the scar on her forearm.

I rolled my eyes. "That was one time—when we were thirteen. Jendayi was a baby. Will you ever forgive her?"

"I've forgiven her, but I don't repeat mistakes, and I try to help others learn from them."

"Here, little Jendayi." Zahra's sing-song tone stole our attention. Balancing precariously on one of the dead branches, she slowly reached for the mirror. "Come, little girl. Give me—"

Jendayi squealed, jumped on Zahra's shoulder, and skittered down the branch—running straight into my arms. The little scamp pressed her lips against my face, then looked over her shoulder and puffed her cheeks at Zahra.

My maid hung from the branch like an overgrown ape, growled, and began her descent. "I daresay your new husband won't endure Jendayi's little pranks. Did your abi inform King Webenre that your 'child' was part of the dowry traveling with us to Abydos?"

A flutter stirred in my belly every time I thought of my upcoming wedding to a man I'd never even seen. "I'm sure Potabi told him whatever was needed to seal our union as divine Abi and Ommi of Egypt."

When Zahra's feet landed on solid ground, she straightened her sheer white robe and glared at me. "Have you considered how Jendayi will react to a child from your womb?"

"What a strange question." Yet inwardly I winced, adding this to my forbidden thoughts. "Jendayi will love my children as she loves me—as I love her."

Hotep left her perch by the east window, where she'd been watching On's activity below, and held out one hand to Jendayi. The monkey gave her the mirror and then curled her arms around my neck. "You see?" Hotep said. "Jendayi loves no one as she loves you,

and she grows jealous when anyone steals your attention. She could harm an infant if—”

“Quiet!” I heard the scuffing of sandals on the stairs. “Potabi’s coming.” It could only be him since no one else climbed our steps. He usually conquered the 375 steps on the first day of each week to teach us a new chant. Any other day, he used the tray attached to ropes and pulleys to send up messages or meals. I lowered my voice. “And don’t ask Potabi anything about marriage and children. I’m nervous enough.”

My maids exchanged an uneasy glance. They were anxious about moving to the Abydos palace, too. Zahra, Hotep, and I had never been in the same room with a man other than Potabi since we were four years old. How could I let a man—even a king—touch me? *Mother Isis, give me courage.* For fifteen years Potabi had kept us in secluded safety on the upper level of Ra’s temple tower, separated from the world below. We were the chantresses of On, serving the great sun god, Ra. We sang from the east window at dawn, midday, and dusk, filling the city with chants of warning, blessing, and grief to glorify our god. Our education came from Potabi, who taught us history, geography, sums, and the hieroglyphs. Above all, he’d emphasized we must be chaste in body, mind, and ka, but he left my wedding night a complete mystery.

Trying to calm myself, I stroked Jendayi’s soft fur and said to my maids, “Isis will give us wisdom for the wedding and the marriage after.”

“I’m happy to hear you say that, Daughter,” Potabi said from the top step, leaning heavily on the railing.

Jendayi gripped my neck a little tighter, always nervous when he came to visit.

“Are you ill, Potabi?” I hurried over and wrapped my arm around his ample waist, guiding him toward our gathering area.

“Leave us.” He waved my maids away.

Dread raised the hairs on my arms. “Is the news so dreadful that my sisters can’t hear—”

“I will speak with my daughter alone.” He glared at me, crankier

than normal in summer's heat.

I bowed in obeisance and then transferred Jendayi to Hotep. She placed my little one in the rope vining corner. Zahra mouthed the words *We'll be listening* and retreated soundlessly across the purple tiles to their adjoining chamber.

Potabi arranged himself on a cushion. I sat across from him and offered the cloth I kept tucked in my belt for him. He wiped the steady stream of sweat seeping from beneath his priestly skullcap. His face and neck were crimson.

"Tell me what's troubled you, Abi."

He looked at me, startled. I called him "Abi" only when we were alone or at times like these, when I sensed he was upset.

His kohl-darkened brows drew together, forming a canal for the sweat to race down his nose. "The gods have taken King Webenre from you, Asenath." He removed his skullcap, smearing sweat and kohl over his head and face.

"Have I done something to offend the gods?"

"Of course not." He waved off the question. "A stronger king took his throne, my girl. An Egyptian more worthy of the throne—and of you."

Years of practiced calm helped me maintain a placid façade. "I'm disappointed that my divine birth as Isis Incarnate may be delayed, but I always defer to the gods' wisdom—and to yours, Potabi." I bowed my head, relief overshadowing every other emotion. How could I feel grief for King Webenre, a man I'd never met? "Who is the worthy Egyptian that the gods have chosen for me instead?" I met his eyes, careful to reflect calm. Potabi had taught me that each emotion triggered a reaction in a person's eyes, brows, lips, hands, and shoulders. To control and sculpt those reactions meant to reflect the elegance and grace of my mother goddess.

"King Apophis." He watched me as he spoke the name. Measuring me. Daring me to react.

"How could . . . I can't . . ." I exhaled to gain composure. "Apophis is co-regent with the half-breed son of the dead Hyksos, Khyan." My voice wobbled, and I fought for control. "Why would

the gods couple Isis Incarnate with the co-regent who served as general of the Hyksos king? How could you even suggest such a thing when my single purpose for life and breath is to reunite the Two Lands under a pure-blooded Egyptian king and purge our nation of the Hyksos pestilence?" My voice rose despite my efforts to remain calm.

Jendayi squawked. She bared her teeth at Potabi and bounced on the branch—a warning to the perceived threat.

"You will calm yourself, or I'll leave." Potabi wiped more sweat from his face while maintaining his infuriating reserve.

I snapped my fingers and called Jendayi from her perch. She skittered over the vines, down the dead branches, and over the purple tiles to leap onto my shoulder, then peeked at Potabi from behind my long dark hair.

In those few moments of silence, Isis gave me wisdom. "I'm trained as Isis's high priestess. Take me to King Webenre and let me use the powers of Egypt's Great Ommi and healer to raise him from the dead."

"No."

"But don't you see? Webenre's death could be a test from the gods. If the high priestess of Isis raises him from the dead, no one could deny we are the *true* king and queen of Egypt, destined to unite the Two Lands and rule from Abydos."

He humiliated me with a condescending smile. "Don't be a fool. You're not Isis yet, and your failure would ruin any other marriage prospect."

"Where is your faith?" Indignation stoked my anger. "How do we know what power flows through us if we never trust the gods to work beyond our control?"

"You're mine to control!"

Jendayi squawked, preparing to lunge, but Potabi's backhand sailed past my cheek and sent her flying across the purple tiles.

"No!" I shrieked, darting after her. Thankfully, she landed in a pile of cushions, but she was terribly shaken. I cradled her, shocked at the man who had once been so kind.

“Keep that animal away from me, or I’ll have it stuffed by morning.”

Shaking like Jendayi, I met Potabi’s angry stare. “You should be relieved Jendayi protects me. You can know I’ll be safe no matter who I marry.”

The harsh lines on his features softened. “You won’t need a protector when you marry Apophis, and I would never let anyone harm you, my girl. Surely you know that by now.”

I wanted to believe it, but when he’d started seeking the gods’ choice for my husband without my input, he treated me more like the high priestess I was becoming instead of the daughter I’d always been. “You’ve always said Ommi’s death meant something, that fulfilling her last wish for me could redeem it.” I inhaled a sustaining breath and grasped at reason. “How can you ask me to marry a soldier who fought for the Hyksos, who destroyed our Songbird of Memphis? Apophis was among the troops who divided Egypt . . .” Tears strangled me, and shame bowed my head. I buried my face in Jendayi’s fur. Potabi would think me nothing but a silly girl. Perhaps I didn’t deserve the calling of incarnate goddess.

“Come, my girl. Sit with me while I explain.” Reluctantly, I accepted the outstretched hand that called me to trust him—the same way he’d coaxed me from beneath the altar that awful night in Memphis when we lost the one we held most dear.

I slipped my hand into his, feeling again the security of his protection. Jendayi hid beneath my hair at the back of my neck while I sat across from him again. Squaring my shoulders, I tried to assume the persona of the goddess while he explained.

“Though Apophis was Pharaoh Khyan’s general, both he and Queen Tani have a unique connection to the Memphite kings.”

“Unique connection?” I choked on his word choice. “Their abi was the Egyptian vizier who betrayed the pharaoh in Memphis and ushered in the first Hyksos king.”

Potabi’s momentary tenderness fled. “Yes, and for nearly two years Apophis has raided villages from Avaris to Abydos killing zealots like us who seek to purge the Hyksos from Egypt.”

“Why would you give Isis Incarnate to a man who kills the very rebels you send silver to support?”

“Because Apophis, misguided though he may be, is ultimately fighting for what we seek—unity for the Two Lands.” He raised a single brow, letting his words tumble in my mind. “Apophis made sure I was appointed to Yanassi’s royal council because Ra is his patron god and I’m the high priest of Ra’s largest temple. Before he began his quest to unify Lower Egypt, he entrusted his sister and his nephew to my god’s care. Queen Tani trusts me implicitly, and Pharaoh Yanassi believes I secure Ra’s favor for both him and his uncle Apophis. But one royal alone possesses unwavering devotion to Ra and the willingness to fight for a united Egypt.” Potabi paused. “When the young pharaoh dies unexpectedly—”

“He’s a little boy. Why must he die?”

“He’s a Hyksos half-breed.”

I agreed with the words. It was his tone that chilled my blood.

“When Yanassi has been removed, King Apophis will rise to Lower Egypt’s throne as a pure-blooded Egyptian. He’s powerful. He’s ruthless. And he trusts his sister, Queen Tani, who will treat you as the daughter she’s always longed for.” He rolled to his knees, struggling to stand. “Besides, it was Apophis who killed King Webenre. He’ll understand his obligation to take you as his bride.”

I tried to swallow my fear as I steadied Potabi on his feet. “Apophis sounds more like a soldier than a king.” Haunting memories came unbidden. Another soldier. Ommi’s last gasp. Her final words. I swiped tears from my cheeks, offended by the weakness they proved.

“I vowed you would marry a king, and you shall.” His harsh features softened again. “When you marry Apophis, you’ll fulfill your destiny as the Great Ommi and healer of Egypt. You must trust me. King Apophis is who the gods and I have chosen for you.”

He’d said the same thing about King Webenre. “If I’m the high priestess of Isis, why haven’t the gods shown *me* who they’ve chosen?”

His eyes grew dead with an emotion worse than anger. “You dis-

appoint me, Priestess.”

Like a millstone around my neck, his words bowed my head in shame. “Forgive me, Highness. I will obey your loving command and the gods’ good wisdom.”

He tipped up my chin. “I forgive you and bless your obedience, Daughter. I sail to Avaris next month to celebrate the Nile’s rebirth. Hopefully, Apophis will return to the capital to celebrate young Yanassi’s eighth akhet festival. If Apophis is a true Egyptian, worthy to marry a goddess, you’ll be his queen before your twentieth Inundation.”

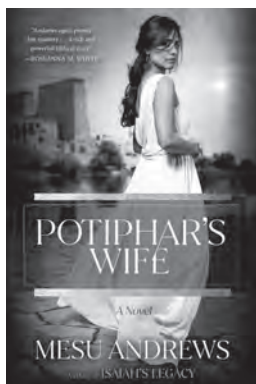
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MESU ANDREWS is the Christy Award–winning author of *Isaiah's Daughter*, whose deep understanding of and love for God's Word brings the biblical world alive for readers. Andrews lives in North Carolina with her husband, Roy. She stays connected with readers through newsie emails, fun blog posts, and frequent short stories. For more information, visit mesuandrews.com.

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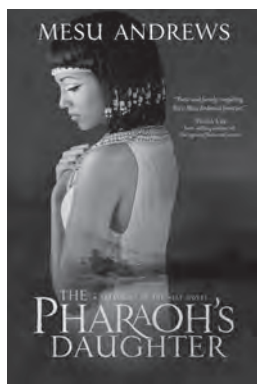
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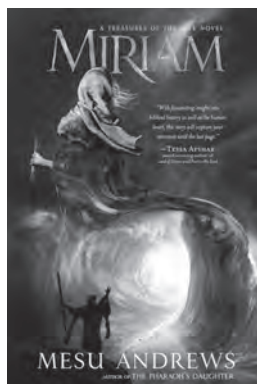
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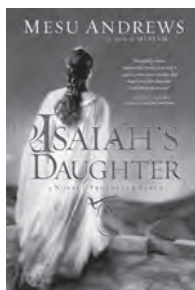


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