



Pharaoh's Daughter: A Novel of Ancient Egypt

By Julius Lester

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Born into slavery, adopted as an infant by a princess, and raised in the palace of mighty Pharaoh, Moses struggles to define himself. And so do the three women who love him: his own embittered mother, forced to give him up by Pharaoh's decree; the Egyptian princess who defies her father and raises Moses as her own child; and his headstrong sister Almah, who discovers a greater kinship with the Egyptian deities than with her own God of the Hebrews. Told by Moses and his sister Almah from alternating points of view, this stunning novel by Newbery Honor-author Julius Lester probes questions of identity, faith, and destiny.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In his introduction to this engrossing novel of ancient Egypt, Julius Lester says, "It is difficult not to see Charlton Heston when one thinks of Moses." But not in this book. Lester's Moses is a bungling teenager, scared and confused as he tries to find the courage to decide who he is and what he believes in. Raised as the pampered grandson of Pharaoh, he enjoys the attentions of three mother figures: Yocheved, his birth mother, who constantly implores him to return to his own people; Almah, his older sister, who has left her traditions to dance naked as a priestess of the goddess Hathor; and Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, who saved him from death when he was a baby. But now his anger at his unresolved split identity has goaded him into a terrible act of violence--an act that will have a vast impact on history.

Julius Lester, a distinguished African-American writer best known for his Newbery Honor Book *To Be a Slave*, startled the literary world in 1981 by converting to Judaism. In *Pharaoh's Daughter* he follows the time-honored Jewish tradition of Midrash--a way of exploring a sacred text through the use of one's imagination. Armed with an impressive knowledge of the Hebrew language and the history of ancient Egypt, he jolts us out of our expectations and brings a fresh and richly detailed perspective to the Exodus. As Moses flees with his father's blessing--"You must go and come back and teach us all to be free"--we can only hope that Julius Lester plans to tell the rest of the story. (Ages 12 and older) --*Patty Campbell*

From Publishers Weekly

"The author imagines a titillating paradise within the pharaoh's walls and makes a compelling case for [young Moses] caught between the faith of his Hebrew mother and his adoptive family's aesthetics and beliefs," wrote PW in our Best Books citation. Ages 10-up. (Feb.) n

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From School Library Journal

Grade 6-9-When Merytamun, the daughter of the Pharaoh, rescues one of the Habiru baby boys condemned to death and takes him to raise as her son, his sister Almah goes with them to live in the palace. Attracting the attention of the Pharaoh because of her resemblance to his dead wife Nefertari, Almah is declared his daughter, displacing Merytamun. At the same time, the princess finds herself increasingly at home among the Habiru people. This rich and fascinating retelling of the well-known tale found in Exodus makes clear Lester's view of the complex nature of the relationship of Khemetians (Egyptians) and Habiru (Hebrews). First told in the voice of Almah and later in the voice of Mosis, the story moves inexorably toward the point at which the young people must decide who they really are. While in some cases characters seem to change without sufficient reason, Almah and Mosis are convincing in their struggle to find their identity. Almah, who becomes a priestess of Eset and dances naked at the festivals, is clearly the same person who, as a child, spontaneously removed her dress each morning to receive the life-giving rays of the rising sun. Mosis, slow in speech and unsure of what he wants, is moved to action only when he is rejected by those whose approval he seeks. Lester has moved well beyond the Cecil B. DeMille view of ancient Egypt and re-created with the great care of a scholar a place, a time, and two cultures that ultimately we can only imagine, but the questions he raises about identity, loyalty, and religion are as familiar today as they were thousands of years ago.

Barbara Scotto, Michael Driscoll School, Brookline, MA

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