



Dinah, daughter of Jacob, opens the story by recounting for readers the union of her mother Leah and father Jacob, as well as the expansion of the family to include Leah's sister Rachel, and the handmaids Zilpah and Bilhah. Leah is depicted as capable but testy, Rachel as something of a belle, but kind and creative, Zilpah as eccentric and spiritual, and Bilhah as the gentle and quiet one of the quartet.

Dinah remembers sitting in the red tent with her mother and aunts, gossiping about local events and taking care of

domestic duties between visits to Jacob, the family's patriarch. A number of other characters not seen in the biblical account appear here, including Laban's second wife Ruti and her feckless sons.

According to the Bible's account in Genesis 34, Dinah was "defiled" by a prince of Shechem, although he is described as being genuinely in love with Dinah. He also offers a bride price fit for royalty. Displeased at how the prince treated their sister, her brothers Shimeon (spelled "Simon" in the book) and Levi treacherously tell the Shechemites that all will be forgiven if the prince and his men undergo the Jewish rite of circumcision (brit milah) so as to unite the people of Hamor, king of Shechem, with the tribe of Jacob. The Shechemites agree, and shortly after they go under the knife, while incapacitated by pain, they are murdered by Dinah's brothers and their male servants, who then return with Dinah.

In The Red Tent, Dinah genuinely loves the prince and willingly becomes his bride. She is horrified and grief-stricken by her brothers' murderous rampage. After cursing her brothers and father she escapes to Egypt, where she gives birth to a son. In time she finds another love and reconciles with her brother Joseph, who is now vizier of Egypt. At the death of Jacob, she visits her estranged family. She learns she has been all but forgotten by her other living brothers and father but that her story lives on with the women of Jacob's tribe.