

## The Snake, the Crocodile and the Dog

This is a story from ancient Egypt. The only known copy was written on the back of the Harris Papyrus, almost 3,500 years ago.

A long time ago in the land of Egypt, lived a Pharaoh whose heart was heavy because he longed for a son. For many years he prayed to the gods until, at last, his prayers were answered. But on the day of his son's birth a prophecy was made - his son was doomed to die by snake, crocodile or dog.

Pharaoh was filled with fear for his son's life and locked him away in the palace where he could be protected. Years passed, and as the prince grew, he became eager to find out more about the world.

One day he escaped from his rooms and for the very first time saw a dog. Curious to know what this new creature was, the Prince asked his servant to bring the animal to him.

As the Prince grew to manhood, he and the dog became firm friends and constant companions.

When the Prince became an adult he went to his father to demand his freedom.

"Hear me. Why am I kept a prisoner here? I am destined to die, by a snake, crocodile or a dog; it is the will of the gods. Then let me go forth and follow my heart's desire while I live."

The old Pharaoh gave his son some weapons and, with sadness in his heart, watched him leave.

After many days journeying, the Prince arrived in a land called Naharina, where he disguised himself as the son of Pharaoh's charioteer. People told the Prince of a beautiful Princess who had been locked in a high tower by her father, the local Chief, who decreed she would be married to the man who rescued her.

The Prince set off to find the tower. After watching others try and fail, he began to climb the wall. Although tired from the effort, he found himself climbing higher and higher, until he was at the window of the Princess's room.

The villagers cheered in admiration at his daring feat and the Prince approached the Chief to demand his reward. Alas, the Chief did not think the son of a charioteer worthy enough to wed his daughter. But she had already fallen in love with the handsome Prince and pleaded with her father to keep his word.

The Chief sighed and agreed to the marriage. He gave the couple land and goods to set up a new home.

The Prince and Princess had a happy marriage but the Prince could not forget his homeland and finally told his wife the story of his fate, that he was destined to die by snake, crocodile or dog. Fearing for her husband, the Princess demanded that the Prince's dog be killed. But the dog had been a faithful companion and the Prince would not let him die.

Keen to see his father one more time, the Prince asked his wife to travel with him back to Egypt, where they lived together near his father's palace.

One evening, the Prince and Princess held a grand feast at their home. Later that night, as the guests and the Prince fell asleep, the Princess spotted a snake slithering towards her husband. She put down a bowl of milk and wine which the snake drank. It was so drunk with the wine that it rolled over helplessly. The Princess immediately leapt up, seized her dagger and cut off the snake's head.

Waking her husband, she said, "Behold, the gods have given me the chance to remove one of your dooms!"

As the years passed, the Prince forgot the prophecy. One day he wandered down to the riverbank, where a river guardian warned him of a large crocodile lurking in the waters. The Prince did not heed the guardian's warning, and visited the riverbank often. One day, the Prince set off once more to his favourite spot by the river. Suddenly, his dog saw a crocodile and barked loudly, alerting the Prince to the danger. But the crocodile proclaimed "I am your doom, and I follow you. If you see me coming once again you will certainly die...."

The papyrus is damaged and the ending of the story is lost. We do not know if the Princess saved the Prince from the other dooms, or if the Prince died.

How do you think the story ends?