# The Prince & His Three Fates

ONCE upon a time a child was born to a king and queen who ruled over a great country on the banks of the Nile River. The royal parents were nearly beside themselves with joy, and they sent invitations at once to the most powerful fairies to come and see this wonderful baby. In an hour or two, so many were gathered round the cradle, that the child seemed in danger of being smothered; but the king, who was watching the fairies eagerly, was disturbed to see them looking grave. "Is there anything the matter?" he asked anxiously. The fairies looked at him, and they all shook their heads at once. "He is a beautiful boy, and it is a great pity; but what is to happen will happen," said they. "It is fated that he must die either by a crocodile, or a serpent, or by a dog. If we could save him we would; but that is beyond our power." And so saying they vanished. For a time the king and queen stood where they were, horrorstricken at what they had heard; but, being of a hopeful nature, they began at once to invent plans to save the prince from the dreadful doom that awaited him. Instantly, the king sent for his master builder, and bade him to construct a strong castle on the top of a mountain, which should be fitted with the most precious things from the king's own palace, and every kind of toy a child could wish to play with. What's more, he gave the strictest orders that a guard should walk round the castle night and day. For four or five years the baby lived in the castle alone with his nurses, taking his airings on the terraces, which were surrounded by walls, with a moat beneath them, and only a drawbridge to connect themselves with the outer world. One day, when the prince was old enough to run quite fast by himself, he looked from the terrace across the moat, and saw a little soft fluffy ball of a dog jumping and playing on the other side. Now, of course, all dogs had been kept away from him for fear that the fairies' prophecy should come true, and he had never even seen one before. So be turned to the page who was walking behind him, and said, "What is that funny little thing which is running so fast over there?" "That is a dog, prince," answered the page. "Well, bring me one like it, and we will see which can run the faster." And he watched the dog until it disappeared round the corner. The page was much puzzled. He had strict orders to refuse the prince nothing, yet he remembered the prophecy, and felt that this was a serious matter. At last he thought he had better tell the king the whole story, and let him decide the question. "Oh, get him a dog if he wants one" said the king, "he will only cry his heart out if he does not have it." So a puppy was found, exactly like the other; they might have been twins, and perhaps they were. Years went by, and the boy and the dog played together till the boy grew tall and strong. The time came at last when he sent a message to his father, saying: "Why do you keep me shut up here, doing nothing? I know all about the prophecy that was made at my birth, but I would far rather be killed at once than live such an idle, useless life here trapped here on this mountain. I beg you, Father, give me arms, and let me go; me and my dog too." Again the king listened to his wishes, and the young prince and his dog were carried in a ship to the other side of the Nile River, which was so broad at that part it might almost have been the sea. A black horse was waiting for him on the other side, tied to a tree, and he mounted it and rode away wherever his fancy took him, the dog always at his heels. Never was any prince so happy as he, and he rode and rode till at length he came to a king's palace. There he presented himself and the king took a fancy to the youth. What's more, his daughter took a fancy to him also and he to her. Soon they fell in love, and were betrothed to be married. "There is one thing you must know about me," the prince said to his betrothed. "I was fated at birth to die in the hands of one of three creatures -- a crocodile, a serpent, or a dog. If you choose not to marry me, I understand." "I love you, no matter what happens," said the princess. "But how rash you are! How can you have that horrid beast about you, knowing what you know? I will give orders to have him killed at once." But the prince would not listen to her. "Kill my dear little dog, who has been my playfellow since he was a puppy?" he cried. "Oh, never would I allow that." And all that the princess could get from him was that he would always wear a sword, and have someone with him at all times when he left the palace. When the prince and princess had been married a few months, the prince heard that his mother had passed away, and that his father was old and ill, and that he longed to have his eldest son by his side again. The young man and his bride set out on a journey back to his native land. That first night that they had arrived, while he was asleep, the princess noticed something strange in one of the corners of the room. It was a dark patch, and seemed, as she looked, to grow longer and longer, and to be moving slowly towards the cushions on which the prince was lying. She shrank in terror, but, slight as was the noise she had made, the thing heard it, and raised its head to listen. Then she saw it was the long flat head of a serpent, and the recollection of the prophecy rushed into her mind. Without waking her husband, she glided out of bed, and taking up a heavy bowl of milk which stood on a table, laid it upon the floor in the path of the serpent -- for she knew that no serpent in the world can resist milk. She held her breath as the snake drew near, and watched it rear up its head again as if it was smelling something nice, while its forked tongue darted out greedily. At length its eyes fell upon the milk, and in an instant it was lapping it up so fast that it was a wonder the creature did not choke, for it never took its head from the bowl as long as a drop was left in it. After that it dropped on the ground and slept heavily. This was what the princess had been waiting for. Summoning her guards, she ordered the serpent to be captured into a large basket with a tight-fitting lid, having enough food to keep the creature for awhile, and ordered the basket to be sent to a very far distant land. Soon after their arrival, the old king, sadly, died. They gave him a magnificent burial, and then the prince had to examine the new laws which had been made in his absence, and do a great deal of other business besides, till he grew quite ill from fatigue, and was obliged to go away to one of his palaces on the banks of the river in order to rest. Here he soon got better, and began to hunt, and wherever he went, his dog, now grown very old, went with him. One morning the prince and his dog were out as usual, and in chasing their game they drew near the bank of the Nile River. The prince was running at full speed after his dog when he almost fell over something that looked like a log of wood, which was lying in his path. To his surprise a voice spoke to him, and he saw that the thing which he had taken for a branch was really a crocodile. "You cannot escape from me," it was saying, when he had gathered his senses again. "I am your fate, and wherever you go, and whatever you do, you will always find me before you. There is only one means of shaking off my power. If you can dig a pit in dry sand which will remain full of water, my spell will be broken. If not death will come to you speedily. I give you this one chance. Now go." The young man walked sadly away, and when he reached the palace he shut himself into his room, and for the rest of the day refused to see anyone, even his wife. By sunset, however, the princess grew quite frightened, and pleaded with him so compellingly that he let her come in. "How pale you look," she cried, "has anything hurt you? Tell me, I pray you, what is the matter?" So the prince told her the whole story, and of the impossible task given him by the crocodile. "How can a sand hole remain full of water?" asked he. "Of course it will all run through. The crocodile called it a 'chance' , but he might as well have dragged me into the river right then and there. Truly, I cannot escape him." "Oh, if that is all," cried the princess, "I can set you free myself, for my fairy godmother taught me to know the use of plants and in the desert not far from here there grows a little four-leafed herb which can keep water in a pit for a whole year. I will go in search of it at dawn, and you can begin to dig the hole so that it's ready on my return." To comfort her husband, the princess had spoken lightly and gaily; but she knew very well in her heart that she had no light task before her. It was still starlight when she left the palace on a snow-white donkey, and rode away from the Nile River straight to the west. For some time she could see nothing before her but a flat waste of sand, which became hotter and hotter as the sun rose higher and higher. Then a dreadful thirst seized her and the donkey, but there was no stream to quench it, and if there had been she would hardly have had time to stop, for she still had far to go, and must be back before evening, or else the crocodile might declare that the prince had not fulfilled his conditions. So she spoke cheering words to her donkey, who brayed in reply, and the two pushed steadily on. Oh! how glad they both were when they caught sight of a tall rock in the distance, which cast a gloriously cool shadow. Though the donkey was content to rest, the princess could not, for the plant, as she knew, grew on the very top of the rock, and a wide chasm ran round the foot of it. Luckily she had brought a rope with her, and making a noose at one end, she flung it across the chasm with all her might. The first time it slid back slowly into the ditch, and she had to draw it up, and throw it again, but at length the noose caught on something, the princess could not see what, and had to trust her whole weight to the rope, which might snap and let her fall deep down among the rocks. And in that case her death was as certain as that of her husband. The heart of the poor princess was filled with despair. Yet bit by bit, with torn and bleeding hands, she gained the top. There such a violent wind was blowing that she was almost blinded with dust, and was obliged to throw herself upon the ground, and feel about after the precious herb. It was a plant, that was clear; but the right one? See she could not, for the wind was blowing more fiercely than ever, so she lay where she was and counted the leaves. One, two, three -- yes! yes! there were four! And plucking a leaf she held it safe in her hand while she turned, almost stunned by the wind, to go down the rock. She slid down the rock, jumped over the chasm with her rope as she had done before, and set off with her donkey, who brayed joyfully at her return. On the bank of the Nile River, the donkey halted, and the princess rushed up to the prince. He was standing by the pit he had dug in the dry sand, with a huge water pot beside it. A little way off the crocodile lay blinking in the sun, with his sharp teeth and whity-yellow jaws wide open. At a signal from the princess the prince poured the water into the hole, and the moment it reached the brim the princess flung in the four-leafed plant. For half an hour they stood with their eyes rooted to the spot, but the hole remained as full as at the beginning, with the little green leaf floating on the top. Then the prince turned with a shout of triumph, and the crocodile sulkily plunged into the river. The prince had escaped forever the second of his three fates! He stood there looking after the crocodile and rejoicing that he was free, when suddenly he was startled by a wild duck which flew past them. In another instant his dog dashed by in hot pursuit, and knocked heavily against his master's legs. The prince staggered, lost his balance and fell backward into the river, where the mud and the rushes caught him and held him fast. He shrieked for help to his wife, who came running, and luckily she brought her rope with her. The prince was pulled to shore, as well as his poor old dog, who had also fallen in the river. "My wife," he said, looking into her eyes with great fondness, "You have been stronger than my fate."

## http://www.fairytales247.com/catalog/egypt-folktales/skazka-the-prince-his-three-fates-666/