

The Girl with the Rose Red Slippers

In the last days of Ancient Egypt, not many years before the country was conquered by the Persians, she was ruled by a Pharaoh called Amasis. So as to strengthen his country against the threat of invasion by Cyrus of Persia, who was conquering all the known world, he welcomed as many Greeks as wished to trade with or settle in Egypt, and gave them a city called Naucratis to be entirely their own.

In Naucratis, not far from the mouth of the Nile that flows into the sea at Canopus, there lived a wealthy Greek merchant called Charaxos. His true home was in the island of Lesbos, and the famous poetess Sappho was his sister; but he had spent most of his life trading with Egypt, and in his old age he settled at Naucratis.

One day when he was walking in the marketplace he saw a great crowd gathered round the place where the slaves were sold. Out of curiosity he pushed his way into their midst, and found that everyone was looking at a beautiful girl who had just been set up on the stone rostrum to be sold.

She was obviously a Greek with white skin and cheeks like blushing roses, and Charaxos caught his breath - for he had never seen anyone so lovely.

Consequently, when the bidding began, Charaxos determined to buy her and, being one of the wealthiest merchants in all Naucratis, he did so without much difficulty.

When he had bought the girl, he discovered that her name was Rhodopis and that she had been carried away by pirates from her home in the north of Greece when she was a child. They had sold her to a rich man who employed many slaves on the island of Samos, and she had grown up there, one of her fellow slaves being an ugly little man called Aesop who was always kind to her and told her the most entrancing stories and fables about animals and birds and human beings.

But when she was grown up, her master wished to make some money out of so beautiful a girl and had sent her to rich Naucratis to be sold.

Charaxos listened to her tale and pitied her deeply. Indeed very soon he became quite besotted about her. He gave her a lovely house to live in, with a garden in the middle of it, and slave girls to attend on her. He heaped her with presents of jewels and beautiful clothes, and spoiled her as if she had been his own daughter.

One day a strange thing happened as Rhodopis was bathing in the marble-edged pool in her secret garden. The slave-girls were holding her clothes and guarding her jeweled girdle and her rose-red slippers of which she was particularly proud, while she lazed in the cool water - for a summer's day even in the north of Egypt grows very hot about noon.

Suddenly when all seemed quiet and peaceful, an eagle came swooping down out of the clear blue sky - down, straight down as if to attack the little group by the pool. The slave-girls dropped everything they were holding and fled shrieking to hide among the trees and flowers of the garden; and Rhodopis rose from the water and stood with her back against the marble fountain at one end of it, gazing with wide, startled eyes.

But the eagle paid no attention to any of them. Instead, it swooped right down and picked up one of her rose-red slippers in its talons. Then it soared up into the air again on its great wings and, still carrying the slipper, flew away to the south over the valley of the Nile.

Rhodopis wept at the loss of her rose-red slipper, feeling sure that she would never see it again, and sorry also to have lost anything that Charaxos had given to her.

But the eagle seemed to have been sent by the gods - perhaps by Horus himself whose sacred bird he was. For he flew straight up the Nile to Memphis and then swooped, down towards the palace.

At that hour Pharaoh Amasis sat in the great courtyard doing justice to his people and hearing any complaints that they wished to bring.

Down over the courtyard swooped the eagle and dropped the rose-red slipper of Rhodopis into Pharaoh's lap.

The people cried out in surprise when they saw, this, and Amasis too was much taken aback. But, as he took up the little rose-red slipper and admired the delicate workmanship and the tiny of it, he felt that the girl for whose foot it was made must indeed be one of the loveliest in the world.

Indeed Amasis the Pharaoh was so moved by what had happened that he issued a decree:

"Let my messengers go forth through all the cities of the Delta and, if need be, into Upper Egypt to the very borders of my kingdom. Let them take with them this rose-red slipper which the divine bird of Horus has brought to me, and let them declare that her from whose foot this slipper came shall be the bride of Pharaoh!"

Then the messengers prostrated themselves crying, "Life, health, strength be to Pharaoh! Pharaoh has spoken and his command shall be obeyed!"

So they set forth from Memphis and went by way of Heliopolis and Tanis and Canopus until they came to Naucratis. Here they heard of the rich merchant Charaxos and of how he had bought the beautiful Greek girl in the slave market, and how he was lavishing all his wealth upon her as if she had been a princess put in his care by the gods.

So they went to the great house beside the Nile and found Rhodopis in the quiet garden beside the pool.

When they showed her the rose-red slipper she cried out in surprise that it was hers. She held out her foot so that they could see how well it fitted her; and she bade one of the slave girls fetch the pair to it which she had kept carefully in memory of her strange adventure with the eagle.

Then the messengers knew that this was the girl whom Pharaoh had sent them to find, and they knelt before her and said, "The good god Pharaoh Amasis - life, health, strength be to him! - bids you come with all speed to his palace at Memphis. There you shall be treated with all honor and given a high place in his Royal House of Women: for he believes that Horus the son of Isis and Osiris sent that eagle to bring the rose-red slipper and cause him to search for you."

Such a command could not be disobeyed. Rhodopis bade farewell to Charaxos, who was torn between joy at her good fortune and sorrow at his loss, and set out for Memphis.

And when Amasis saw her beauty, he was sure that the gods had sent her to him. He did not merely take her into his Royal House of Women, he made her his Queen and the Royal Lady of Egypt. And they lived happily together for the rest of their lives and died a year before the coming of Ambyses the Persian.

The Sphinx and the Prince

Once upon a time, many more years than you can tell me, and twice as many as I can tell you, there was a prince in Egypt named Thutmose. He was the son of the great Amenhotep and had been named for his grandfather, the pharaoh Thutmose III who had succeeded the great queen, Hatshepsut.

Because he was the eldest son of Amenhotep, many of his brothers and half-brothers would plot against him, for they desired to be pharaoh. They would plot to make Amenhotep think that Thutmose was unworthy to succeed him. They would plot to make him look a fool in front of the people so that they would not want him as pharaoh. As he got older they would even plot against his life. But all these plots would fail, for Thutmose honored the gods, and so they smiled upon him.

Yet Thutmose was troubled in his heart, and these things made him unhappy. He would frequently leave Memphis to go hunt in the desert, or to seek solitude in the mountains. Even when his father wished his presence for a festival or simply to speak to him, Thutmose would stay as short a time as he could and then leave with his trusted servants once more. Amenhotep grieved that his son was unhappy, and prayed to the gods that his heart might be lifted.

One day, during the great Festival of Ra at Heliopolis, when all of the pharaoh's court was present, Thutmose escaped once more, for he wished to see the pyramids of Saqqara, the oldest of them all. He and two servants rode out into the desert where they found the great Step Pyramid of Zoser, the ancestor of Amenhotep.

The next day, they went hunting for gazelle all morning, and when Ra had reached the height of the sky, and the day grew hot, Thutmose and his servants found themselves near the Great Pyramids of Giza, which the pharaohs Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure had built over twelve hundred years before Thutmose was born.

Thutmose bade his servants rest at a pool nearby, for he wished to go off for a time that he might offer prayer to his ancestors. He rode his chariot out to the pyramids, the sun gleaming off their polished sides. He stopped and marveled at them, knowing that nowhere else was their like equaled, and that at no time since could anything like them be built. He gazed upon them for a time and then noticed a huge stone head that rose out of the sand.

Thutmose had heard of this marvel, the Sphinx of Khafre, though he had never see it before. It was modeled on the sacred animal of Harmakhet, Horus of the Rising Sun, and a creature of great wisdom and power. During the many ages since the reign of Khafre, the sands had buried it almost completely. Only its head remained above the sand, defying all attempts to hide it forever.

Thutmose sat and contemplated the great face, which was said to be the face of Khafre. It wore the headdress of the pharaoh, a great crown and veil, with the uraeus cobra and udjat eye, symbols of power, placed in it. He had never seen such terrifying beauty. He prayed to Harmakhet for deliverance from his troubles.

When he was finished, there was a rumbling sound, and the sand trembled beneath his feet. Thutmose looked up at the sphinx and started, for the head had moved! The sphinx moved like a great cat attempting to free itself from bonds, and then turned its head toward Thutmose and spoke in a mighty yet kind voice.

"Behold, Thutmose, son of Amenhotep, who is pharaoh of men by the power of Horus, know that I am Harmakhet, Horus of the Rising Sun. I am your father, and the father of all pharaohs of Egypt. It is your destiny that the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt shall come to you, to be taken up or cast aside as you will.

"Know that if you become pharaoh, my blessings will be upon you, and you shall have long life and health all your days. Under your rule, Egypt will become strong and rich, and its people shall never want, for there shall be days of plenty.

"You have shown me devotion this day, when my statue is all but forgotten in the desert, and so I have looked kindly upon you. But I ask of you one thing: see how the sand encloses me and hides me from my people? I ask that if you are a good son, that you will help me and free me from the desert sands. Clear away that which holds me fast so that the people may once again come to me and and worship."

Then Thutmose was surrounded by light and he knew no more. When he awoke, the Sun Boat of Ra was sinking in the west. He heard the voices of his servants calling to him and he called out that he was alive and well. He looked up and saw the Sphinx, lifeless once more, and he remembered the vision.

He stood and shouted aloud, "Harmakhet my father! This day I do swear an oath, and I call upon the gods to witness it! If I become pharaoh, my first command shall be that your sacred image, this Sphinx, shall be freed from the sand and restored to its glory, that all men may come and give you honor!"

Thutmose and his servants rode back to Memphis, and from that day forth, all that Thutmose did was blessed. Soon his father Amenhotep named him as heir to the throne, and years later, Thutmose became pharaoh. He was regarded as a great king, and the gods blessed him all the days of his long life and he was beloved by his people. Egypt did indeed become strong and rich, and there was abundance in all of Egypt.

The Prince and the Three Fates

The Brown Fairy Book, by Andrew Lang

Once upon a time a little boy was born to a king who ruled over a great country through which ran a wide river. The king was nearly beside himself with joy, for he had always longed for a son to inherit his crown, and he sent messages to beg all 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 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 written in the books of fate 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 stood where he was, horror-stricken at what he had heard; but, being of a hopeful nature, he began at once to invent plans to save the prince from the dreadful doom that awaited him. He instantly sent for his master builder, and bade him 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. And, besides, 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 broad terraces, which were surrounded by walls, with a moat beneath them, and only a drawbridge to connect them 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 from him for fear that the fairies' prophecy should come true, and he had never even beheld one before. So he 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 till it had disappeared round the corner.

The page was much puzzled to know what to do. 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 an idle, useless life here. So give me arms, and let me go, I pray you; me and my dog too."

And again the king listened to his wishes, and he and his dog were carried in a ship to the other side of the river, which was so broad here it might almost have been the sea. A black horse was waiting for him, tied to a tree, and he mounted 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.

The king who lived in it did not care about looking after his country, and seeing that his people lived cheerful and contented lives. He spent his whole time in making riddles, and inventing plans which he had much better have let alone. At the period when the young prince reached the kingdom he had just completed a wonderful house for his only child, a daughter. It had seventy windows, each seventy feet from the ground, and he had sent the royal herald round the borders of the neighbouring kingdoms to proclaim that whoever could climb up the walls to the window of the princess should win her for his wife.

The fame of the princess's beauty had spread far and wide, and there was no lack of princes who wished to try their fortune. Very funny the palace must have looked each morning, with the dabs of different colour on the white marble as the princes were climbing up the walls. But though some managed to get further than others, nobody was anywhere near the top.

They had already been spending several days in this manner when the young prince arrived, and as he was pleasant to look upon, and civil to talk to, they welcomed him to the house, which had been given to them, and saw that his bath was properly perfumed after his long journey. "Where do you come from?" they said at last. "And whose son are you?"

But the young prince had reasons for keeping his own secret, and he answered:

"My father was master of the horse to the king of my country, and after my mother died he married another wife. At first all went well, but as soon as she had babies of her own she hated me, and I fled, lest she should do me harm."

The hearts of the other young men were touched as soon as they heard this story, and they did everything they could think of to make him forget his past sorrows.

"What are you doing here?" said the youth, one day.

"We spend our whole time climbing up the walls of the palace, trying to reach the windows of the princess," answered the young men; "but, as yet, no one has reached within ten feet of them."

"Oh, let me try too," cried the prince; "but to-morrow I will wait and see what you do before I begin."

So the next day he stood where he could watch the young men go up, and he noted the places on the wall that seemed most difficult, and made up his mind that when his turn came he would go up some other way.

Day after day he was to be seen watching the wooers, till, one morning, he felt that he knew the plan of the walls by heart, and took his place by the side of the others. Thanks to what he had learned from the failure of the rest, he managed to grasp one little rough projection after another, till at last, to the envy of his friends, he stood on the sill of the princess's window. Looking up from below, they saw a white hand stretched forth to draw him in.

Then one of the young men ran straight to the king's palace, and said: "The wall has been climbed, and the prize is won!"

"By whom?" cried the king, starting up from his throne; "which of the princes may I claim as my son-in-law?"

"The youth who succeeded in climbing to the princess's window is not a prince at all," answered the young man. "He is the son of the master of the horse to the great king who dwells across the river, and he fled from his own country to escape from the hatred of his stepmother."

At this news the king was very angry, for it had never entered his head that anyone BUT a prince would seek to woo his daughter.

"Let him go back to the land whence he came," he shouted in wrath; "does he expect me to give my daughter to an exile?" And he began to smash the drinking vessels in his fury; indeed, he quite frightened the young man, who ran hastily home to his friends, and told the youth what the king had said.

Now the princess, who was leaning from her window, heard his words and bade the messenger go back to the king her father and tell him that she had sworn a vow never to eat or drink again if the youth was taken from her. The king was more angry than ever when he received this message, and ordered his guards to go at once to the palace and put the successful wooer to death; but the princess threw herself between him and his murderers.

“Lay a finger on him, and I shall be dead before sunset,” said she; and as they saw that she meant it, they left the palace, and carried the tale to her father.

By this time the king’s anger was dying away, and he began to consider what his people would think of him if he broke the promise he had publicly given. So he ordered the princess to be brought before him, and the young man also, and when they entered the throne room he was so pleased with the noble air of the victor that his wrath quite melted away, and he ran to him and embraced him.

“Tell me who you are?” he asked, when he had recovered himself a little, “for I will never believe that you have not royal blood in your veins.”

But the prince still had his reasons for being silent, and only told the same story. However, the king had taken such a fancy to the youth that he said no more, and the marriage took place the following day, and great herds of cattle and a large estate were given to the young couple.

After a little while the prince said to his wife: “My life is in the hands of three creatures—a crocodile, a serpent, and a dog.”

“Ah, how rash you are!” cried the princess, throwing her arms round his neck. “If you know that, how can you have that horrid beast about you? I will give orders to have him killed at once.”

But the prince would not listen to her.

“Kill my dear little dog, who had been my playfellow since he was a puppy?” exclaimed he. “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 somebody with him when he left the palace.

When the prince and princess had been married a few months, the prince heard that his stepmother was dead, and his father was old and ill, and longing to have his eldest son by his side again. The young man could not remain deaf to such a message, and he took a tender farewell of his wife, and set out on his journey home. It was a long way, and he was forced to rest often on the road, and so it happened that, one night, when he was sleeping in a city on the banks of the great river, a huge crocodile came silently up and made its way along a passage to the prince’s room. Fortunately one of his guards woke up as it was trying to steal past them, and shut the crocodile up in a large hall, where a giant watched over it, never leaving the spot except during the night, when the crocodile slept. And this went on for more than a month.

Now, when the prince found that he was not likely to leave his father's kingdom again, he sent for his wife, and bade the messenger tell her that he would await her coming in the town on the banks of the great river. This was the reason why he delayed his journey so long, and narrowly escaped being eaten by the crocodile. During the weeks that followed the prince amused himself as best he could, though he counted the minutes to the arrival of the princess, and when she did come, he at once prepared to start for the court. That very night, however, 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, 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 on 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 throw up its head again as if it was smelling something nice, while its forky tongue darted out greedily. At length its eyes fell upon the milk, and in an instant it was lapping it 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, and catching up her husband's sword, she severed the snake's head from its body.

The morning after this adventure the prince and princess set out for the king's palace, but found when they reached it, that he was already dead. 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 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 to shoot wild duck with his bow; 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 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 the 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, not even his wife. At sunset, however, as no sound could be heard through the door, the princess grew quite frightened, and made such a noise that the prince was forced to draw back the bolt and let her come in. "How pale you look," she cried, "has anything hurt you? Tell me, I pray you, what is the matter, for perhaps I can help!"

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 at once. He said truly that 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-leaved herb which will keep the water in the pit for a whole year. I will go in search of it at dawn, and you can begin to dig the hole as soon as you like."

To comfort her husband, the princess had spoken lightly and gaily; but she knew very well she had no light task before her. Still, she was full of courage and energy, and determined that, one way or another, her husband should be saved.

It was still starlight when she left the palace on a snow-white donkey, and rode away from the 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. They forgot that they were thirsty, and that the sun was hot; and the ground seemed to fly under their feet, till the donkey stopped of its own accord in the cool shadow. But though the donkey might 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 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 this little bridge, which might snap and let her fall deep down among the rocks. And in that case her death was as certain as that of the prince.

But nothing so dreadful happened. The princess got safely to the other side, and then became the worst part of her task. As fast as she put her foot on a ledge of the rock the stone broke away from under her, and left her in the same place as before. Meanwhile the hours were passing, and it was nearly noon.

The heart of the poor princess was filled with despair, but she would not give up the struggle. She looked round till she saw a small stone above her which seemed rather stronger than the rest, and by only poising her foot lightly on those that lay between, she managed by a great effort to reach it. In this way, with torn and bleeding hands, she gained the top; but here such a violent wind was blowing that she was almost blinded with dust, and was obliged to throw herself on the ground, and feel about after the precious herb.

For a few terrible moments she thought that the rock was bare, and that her journey had been to no purpose. Feel where she would, there was nothing but grit and stones, when, suddenly, her fingers touched something soft in a crevice. It was a plant, that was clear; but was it 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.

When once she was safely over the side all became still in a moment, and she slid down the rock so fast that it was only a wonder that she did not land in the chasm. However, by good luck, she stopped quite close to her rope bridge and was soon across it. The donkey brayed joyfully at the sight of her, and set off home at his best speed, never seeming to know that the earth under his feet was nearly as hot as the sun above him.

On the bank of the great river he halted, and the princess rushed up to where the prince was standing by the pit he had dugged 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 in the hole, and the moment it reached the brim the princess flung in the four-leaved plant. Would the charm work, or would the water trickle away slowly through the sand, and the prince fall a victim to that horrible monster? 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 escape for ever the second of his three fates!

He stood there looking after the crocodile, and rejoicing that he was free, when he was startled by a wild duck which flew past them, seeking shelter among the rushes that bordered the edge of the stream. 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 backwards 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 brought her rope with her. The poor old dog was drowned, but the prince was pulled to shore. "My wife," he said, "has been stronger than my fate."

[Adapted from Les Contes Populaires de l'Egypte Ancienne.]

The Story Of The Sham Prince, Or The Ambitious Tailor

The Crimson Fairy Book, by Andrew Lang

Once upon a time there lived a respectable young tailor called Labakan, who worked for a clever master in Alexandria. No one could call Labakan either stupid or lazy, for he could work extremely well and quickly—when he chose; but there was something not altogether right about him.

Sometimes he would stitch away as fast as if he had a red-hot needle and a burning thread, and at other times he would sit lost in thought, and with such a queer look about him that his fellow-workmen used to say, "Labakan has got on his aristocratic face today."

On Fridays he would put on his fine robe which he had bought with the money he had managed to save up, and go to the mosque. As he came back, after prayers, if he met any friend who said "Good-day," or "How are you, friend Labakan?" he would wave his hand graciously or nod in a condescending way; and if his master happened to say to him, as he sometimes did, "Really, Labakan, you look like a prince," he was delighted, and would answer, "Have you noticed it too?" or "Well, so I have long thought."

Things went on like this for some time, and the master put up with Labakan's absurdities because he was, on the whole, a good fellow and a clever workman.

One day, the sultan's brother happened to be passing through Alexandria, and wanted to have one of his state robes altered, so he sent for the master tailor, who handed the robe over to Labakan as his best workman.

In the evening, when every one had left the workshop and gone home, a great longing drove Labakan back to the place where the royal robe hung. He stood a long time gazing at it, admiring the rich material and the splendid embroidery in it. At last he could hold out no longer. He felt he must try it on, and lo! and behold, it fitted as though it had been made for him.

"Am not I as good a prince as any other?" he asked himself, as he proudly paced up and down the room. "Has not the master often said that I seemed born to be a prince?"

It seemed to him that he must be the son of some unknown monarch, and at last he determined to set out at once and travel in search of his proper rank.

He felt as if the splendid robe had been sent him by some kind fairy, and he took care not to neglect such a precious gift. He collected all his savings, and, concealed by the darkness of the night, he passed through the gates of Alexandria.

The new prince excited a good deal of curiosity where ever he went, for his splendid robe and majestic manner did not seem quite suitable to a person travelling on foot. If anyone asked questions, he only replied with an important air of mystery that he had his own reasons for not riding.

However, he soon found out that walking made him ridiculous, so at last he bought a quiet, steady old horse, which he managed to get cheap.

One day, as he was ambling along upon Murva (that was the horse's name), a horseman overtook him and asked leave to join him, so that they might both beguile the journey with pleasant talk. The newcomer was a bright, cheerful, good-looking young man, who soon plunged into conversation and asked many questions. He told Labakan that his own name was Omar, that he was a nephew of Elfi Bey, and was travelling in order to carry out a command given him by his uncle on his death bed. Labakan was not quite so open in his confidences, but hinted that he too was of noble birth and was travelling for pleasure.

The two young men took a fancy to each other and rode on together. On the second day of their journey Labakan questioned Omar as to the orders he had to carry out, and to his surprise heard this tale.

Elfi Bey, Pacha of Cairo, had brought up Omar from his earliest childhood, and the boy had never known his parents. On his deathbed Elfi Bey called Omar to him, and then told him that he was not his nephew, but the son of a great king, who, having been warned of coming dangers by his astrologers, had sent the young prince away and made a vow not to see him till his twenty-second birthday.

Elfi Bey did not tell Omar his father's name, but expressly desired him to be at a great pillar four days' journey east of Alexandria on the fourth day of the coming month, on which day he would be twenty-two years old. Here he would meet some men, to whom he was to hand a dagger which Elfi Bey gave him, and to say "Here am I for whom you seek."

If they answered: "Praised be the Prophet who has preserved you," he was to follow them, and they would take him to his father.

Labakan was greatly surprised and interested by this story, but after hearing it he could not help looking on Prince Omar with envious eyes, angry that his friend should have the position he himself longed so much for. He began to make comparisons between the prince and himself, and was obliged to confess that he was a fine-looking young man with very good manners and a pleasant expression.

At the same time, he felt sure that had he been in the prince's place any royal father might have been glad to own him.

These thoughts haunted him all day, and he dreamt them all night. He woke very early, and as he saw Omar sleeping quietly, with a happy smile on his face, a wish arose in his mind to take by force or by cunning the things which an unkind fate had denied him.

The dagger which was to act as a passport was sticking in Omar's girdle. Labakan drew it gently out, and hesitated for a moment whether or not to plunge it into the heart of the sleeping prince. However, he shrank from the idea of murder, so he contented himself with placing the dagger in his own belt, and, saddling Omar's swift horse for himself, was many miles away before the prince woke up to realise his losses.

For two days Labakan rode on steadily, fearing lest, after all, Omar might reach the meeting place before him. At the end of the second day he saw the great pillar at a distance. It stood on a little hill in the middle of a plain, and could be seen a very long way off. Labakan's heart beat fast at the sight. Though he had had some time in which to think over the part he meant to play his conscience made him rather uneasy. However, the thought that he must certainly have been born to be a king supported him, and he bravely rode on.

The neighbourhood was quite bare and desert, and it was a good thing that the new prince had brought food for some time with him, as two days were still wanting till the appointed time.

Towards the middle of the next day he saw a long procession of horses and camels coming towards him. It halted at the bottom of the hill, and some splendid tents were pitched. Everything looked like the escort of some great man. Labakan made a shrewd guess that all these people had come here on his account; but he checked his impatience, knowing that only on the fourth day could his wishes be fulfilled.

The first rays of the rising sun woke the happy tailor. As he began to saddle his horse and prepare to ride to the pillar, he could not help having some remorseful thoughts of the trick he had played and the blighted hopes of the real prince. But the die was cast, and his vanity whispered that he was as fine looking a young man as the proudest king might wish his son to be, and that, moreover, what had happened had happened.

With these thoughts he summoned up all his courage sprang on his horse, and in less than a quarter of an hour was at the foot of the hill. Here he dismounted, tied the horse to a bush, and, drawing out Prince Omar's dagger climbed up the hill.

At the foot of the pillar stood six men round a tall and stately person. His superb robe of cloth of gold was girt round him by a white cashmere shawl, and his white, richly jewelled turban showed that he was a man of wealth and high rank.

Labakan went straight up to him, and, bending low, handed him the dagger, saying: "Here am I whom you seek."

"Praised be the Prophet who has preserved you! replied the old man with tears of joy. "Embrace me, my dear son Omar!"

The proud tailor was deeply moved by these solemn words, and with mingled shame and joy sank into the old king's arms.

But his happiness was not long unclouded. As he raised his head he saw a horseman who seemed trying to urge a tired or unwilling horse across the plain.

Only too soon Labakan recognised his own old horse, Murva, and the real Prince Omar, but having once told a lie he made up his mind not to own his deceit.

At last the horseman reached the foot of the hill. Here he flung himself from the saddle and hurried up to the pillar.

"Stop!" he cried, "whoever you may be, and do not let a disgraceful impostor take you in. My name is Omar, and let no one attempt to rob me of it."

This turn of affairs threw the standers-by into great surprise. The old king in particular seemed much moved as he looked from one face to the other. At last Labakan spoke with forced calmness, "Most gracious lord and father, do not let yourself be deceived by this man. As far as I know, he is a half-crazy tailor's apprentice from Alexandria, called Labakan, who really deserves more pity than anger."

These words infuriated the prince. Foaming with rage, he tried to press towards Labakan, but the attendants threw themselves upon him and held him fast, whilst the king said, "Truly, my dear son, the poor fellow is quite mad. Let him be bound and placed on a dromedary. Perhaps we may be able to get some help for him."

The prince's first rage was over, and with tears he cried to the king, "My heart tells me that you are my father, and in my mother's name I entreat you to hear me."

"Oh! heaven forbid!" was the reply. "He is talking nonsense again. How can the poor man have got such notions into his head?"

With these words the king took Labakan's arm to support him down the hill. They both mounted richly caparisoned horses and rode across the plain at the head of their followers.

The unlucky prince was tied hand and foot, and fastened on a dromedary, a guard riding on either side and keeping a sharp look-out on him.

The old king was Sached, Sultan of the Wachabites. For many years he had had no children, but at length the son he had so long wished for was born. But the sooth-sayers and magicians whom he consulted as to the child's future all said that until he was twenty-two years old he stood in danger of being injured by an enemy. So, to make all safe, the sultan had confided the prince to his trusty friend Elfi Bey, and deprived himself of the happiness of seeing him for twenty-two years. All this the sultan told Labakan, and was much pleased by his appearance and dignified manner.

When they reached their own country they were received with every sign of joy, for the news of the prince's safe return had spread like wildfire, and every town and village was decorated, whilst the inhabitants thronged to greet them with cries of joy and thankfulness. All this filled Labakan's proud heart with rapture, whilst the unfortunate Omar followed in silent rage and despair.

At length they arrived in the capital, where the public rejoicings were grander and more brilliant than anywhere else. The queen awaited them in the great hall of the palace, surrounded by her entire court. It was getting dark, and hundreds of coloured hanging lamps were lit to turn night into day.

The brightest hung round the throne on which the queen sat, and which stood above four steps of pure gold inlaid with great amethysts. The four greatest nobles in the kingdom held a canopy of crimson silk over the queen, and the Sheik of Medina fanned her with a peacock-feather fan.

In this state she awaited her husband and her son. She, too, had not seen Omar since his birth, but so many dreams had shown her what he would look like that she felt she would know him among a thousand.

And now the sound of trumpets and drums and of shouts and cheers outside announced the long looked for moment. The doors flew open, and between rows of low-bending courtiers and servants the king approached the throne, leading his pretended son by the hand.

"Here," said he, "is he for whom you have been longing so many years."

But the queen interrupted him, "That is not my son!" she cried. "That is not the face the Prophet has shown me in my dreams!"

Just as the king was about to reason with her, the door was thrown violently open, and Prince Omar rushed in, followed by his keepers, whom he had managed to get away from. He flung himself down before the throne, panting out, "Here will I die; kill me at once, cruel father, for I cannot bear this shame any longer."

Everyone pressed round the unhappy man, and the guards were about to seize him, when the queen, who at first was dumb with surprise, sprang up from her throne.

"Hold!" cried she. "This and no other is the right one; this is the one whom my eyes have never yet seen, but whom my heart recognises."

The guards had stepped back, but the king called to them in a furious voice to secure the madman.

"It is I who must judge," he said in tones of command; "and this matter cannot be decided by women's dreams, but by certain unmistakable signs. This one" (pointing to Labakan) "is my son, for it was he who brought me the token from my friend Elfi—the dagger."

"He stole it from me," shrieked Omar; "he betrayed my unsuspecting confidence."

But the king would not listen to his son's voice, for he had always been accustomed to depend on his own judgment. He let the unhappy Omar be dragged from the hall, whilst he himself retired with Labakan to his own rooms, full of anger with the queen his wife, in spite of their many years of happy life together.

The queen, on her side, was plunged in grief, for she felt certain that an impostor had won her husband's heart and taken the place of her real son.

When the first shock was over she began to think how she could manage to convince the king of his mistake. Of course it would be a difficult matter, as the man who declared he was Omar had produced the dagger as a token, besides talking of all sorts of things which happened when he was a child. She called her oldest and wisest ladies about her and asked their advice, but none of them had any to give. At last one very clever old woman said: "Did not the young man who brought the dagger call him whom your majesty believes to be your son Labakan, and say he was a crazy tailor?"

"Yes," replied the queen; "but what of that?"

"Might it not be," said the old lady, "that the impostor has called your real son by his own name? If this should be the case, I know of a capital way to find out the truth."

And she whispered some words to the queen, who seemed much pleased, and went off at once to see the king.

Now the queen was a very wise woman, so she pretended to think she might have made a mistake, and only begged to be allowed to put a test to the two young men to prove which was the real prince.

The king, who was feeling much ashamed of the rage he had been in with his dear wife, consented at once, and she said: "No doubt others would make them ride or shoot, or something of that sort, but every one learns these things. I wish to set them a task which requires sharp wits and clever hands, and I want them to try which of them can best make a kaftan and pair of trousers."

The king laughed. "No, no, that will never do. Do you suppose my son would compete with that crazy tailor as to which could make the best clothes? Oh, dear, no, that won't do at all."

But the queen claimed his promise, and as he was a man of his word the king gave in at last. He went to his son and begged that he would humour his mother, who had set her heart on his making a kaftan.

The worthy Labakan laughed to himself. "If that is all she wants," thought he, "her majesty will soon be pleased to own me."

Two rooms were prepared, with pieces of material, scissors, needles and threads, and each young man was shut up in one of them.

The king felt rather curious as to what sort of garment his son would make, and the queen, too, was very anxious as to the result of her experiment.

On the third day they sent for the two young men and their work. Labakan came first and spread out his kaftan before the eyes of the astonished king. "See, father," he said; "see, my honoured mother, if this is not a masterpiece of work. I'll bet the court tailor himself cannot do better.

The queen smiled and turned to Omar: "And what have you done, my son?"

Impatiently he threw the stuff and scissors down on the floor. "I have been taught how to manage a horse, to draw a sword, and to throw a lance some sixty paces, but I never learnt to sew, and such a thing would have been thought beneath the notice of the pupil of Elfi Bey, the ruler of Cairo."

"Ah, true son of your father," cried the queen; "if only I might embrace you and call you son! Forgive me, my lord and husband," she added, turning to the king, "for trying to find out the truth in this way. Do you not see yourself now which is the prince and which the tailor? Certainly this kaftan is a very fine one, but I should like to know what master taught this young man how to make clothes."

The king sat deep in thought, looking now at his wife and now at Labakan, who was doing his best to hide his vexation at his own stupidity. At last the king said: "Even this trial does not satisfy me; but happily I know of a sure way to discover whether or not I have been deceived."

He ordered his swiftest horse to be saddled, mounted, and rode off alone into a forest at some little distance. Here lived a kindly fairy called Adolzaide, who had often helped the kings of his race with her good advice, and to her he betook himself.

In the middle of the forest was a wide open space surrounded by great cedar trees, and this was supposed to be the fairy's favourite spot. When the king reached this place he dismounted, tied his horse to the tree, and standing in the middle of the open place said: "If it is true that you have helped my ancestors in their time of need, do not despise their descendant, but give me counsel, for that of men has failed me."

He had hardly finished speaking when one of the cedar trees opened, and a veiled figure all dressed in white stepped from it.

"I know your errand, King Sached," she said; "it is an honest one, and I will give you my help. Take these two little boxes and let the two men who claim to be your son choose between them. I know that the real prince will make no mistake."

She then handed him two little boxes made of ivory set with gold and pearls. On the lid of each (which the king vainly tried to open) was an inscription in diamonds. On one stood the words "Honour and Glory," and on the other "Wealth and Happiness."

"It would be a hard choice," thought the king as he rode home.

He lost no time in sending for the queen and for all his court, and when all were assembled he made a sign, and Labakan was led in. With a proud air he walked up to the throne, and kneeling down, asked:

"What does my lord and father command?"

The king replied: "My son, doubts have been thrown on your claim to that name. One of these boxes contains the proofs of your birth. Choose for yourself. No doubt you will choose right."

He then pointed to the ivory boxes, which were placed on two little tables near the throne.

Labakan rose and looked at the boxes. He thought for some minutes, and then said: "My honoured father, what can be better than the happiness of being your son, and what nobler than the riches of your love. I choose the box with the words 'Wealth and Happiness.'"

"We shall see presently if you have chosen the right one. For the present take a seat there beside the Pacha of Medina," replied the king.

Omar was next led in, looking sad and sorrowful. He threw himself down before the throne and asked what was the king's pleasure. The king pointed out the two boxes to him, and he rose and went to the tables. He carefully read the two mottoes and said: "The last few days have shown me how uncertain is happiness and how easily riches vanish away. Should I lose a crown by it I make my choice of 'Honour and Glory.'"

He laid his hand on the box as he spoke, but the king signed to him to wait, and ordered Labakan to come to the other table and lay his hand on the box he had chosen.

Then the king rose from his throne, and in solemn silence all present rose too, whilst he said: "Open the boxes, and may Allah show us the truth."

The boxes were opened with the greatest ease. In the one Omar had chosen lay a little gold crown and sceptre on a velvet cushion. In Labakan's box was found—a large needle with some thread!

The king told the two young men to bring him their boxes. They did so. He took the crown in his hand, and as he held it, it grew bigger and bigger, till it was as large as a real crown. He placed it on the head of his son Omar, kissed him on the forehead, and placed him on his right hand. Then, turning to Labakan, he said: "There is an old proverb, 'The cobbler sticks to his last.' It seems as though you were to stick to your needle. You have not deserved any mercy, but I cannot be harsh on this day. I give you your life, but I advise you to leave this country as fast as you can."

Full of shame, the unlucky tailor could not answer. He flung himself down before Omar, and with tears in his eyes asked: "Can you forgive me, prince?"

In the midst of all the noise and rejoicing Labakan slipped off with his little box under his arm. He went to the stables, saddled his old horse, Murva, and rode out of the gate towards Alexandria. Nothing but the ivory box with its diamond motto was left to show him that the last few weeks had not been a dream.

When he reached Alexandria he rode up to his old master's door. When he entered the shop, his master came forward to ask what was his pleasure, but as soon as he saw who it was he called his workmen, and they all fell on Labakan with blows and angry words, till at last he fell, half fainting, on a heap of old clothes.

The master then scolded him soundly about the stolen robe, but in vain Labakan told him he had come to pay for it and offered three times its price. They only fell to beating him again, and at last pushed him out of the house more dead than alive.

He could do nothing but remount his horse and ride to an inn. Here he found a quiet place in which to rest his bruised and battered limbs and to think over his many misfortunes. He fell asleep fully determined to give up trying to be great, but to lead the life of an honest workman.

Next morning he set to work to fulfil his good resolutions. He sold his little box to a jeweller for a good price, bought a house and opened a workshop. Then he hung up a sign with, "Labakan, Tailor," over his door, and sat down to mend his own torn clothes with the very needle which had been in the ivory box.

After a while he was called away, and when he went back to his work he found a wonderful thing had happened! The needle was sewing away all by itself and making the neatest little stitches, such as Labakan had never been able to make even at his best.

Certainly even the smallest gift of a kind fairy is of great value, and this one had yet another advantage, for the thread never came to an end, however much the needle sewed.

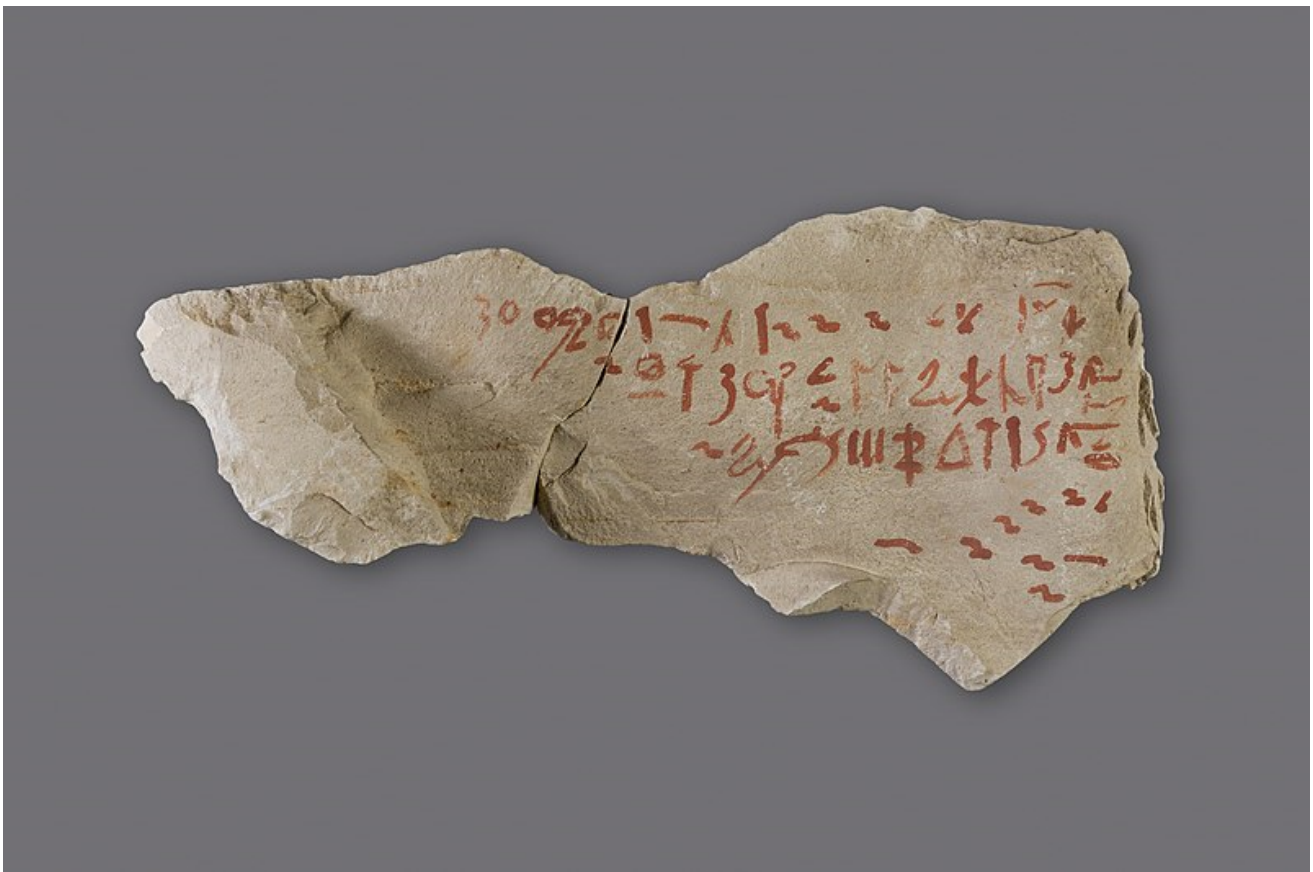
Labakan soon got plenty of customers. He used to cut out the clothes, make the first stitch with the magic needle, and then leave it to do the rest. Before long the whole town went to him, for his work was both so good and so cheap. The only puzzle was how he could do so much, working all alone, and also why he worked with closed doors.

And so the promise on the ivory box of "Wealth and Happiness" came true for him, and when he heard of all the brave doings of Prince Omar, who was the pride and darling of his people and the terror of his enemies, the ex-prince thought to himself, "After all, I am better off as a tailor, for 'Honour and Glory' are apt to be very dangerous things."

The Instructions of Amenemope Foreword

The Instructions of Amenemope is an Ancient Egyptian document dating from anywhere between 1000 B.C. and 600 B.C. It was allegedly written by a scribe named Amenemope who wanted to pass down wisdom and advice to his son, who was preparing to replace him in his position as the kingdom's scribe. It is considered to be among Egypt's oldest wisdom literature, and may have influenced the writers of Proverbs, which has several parallels to some of Amenemope's verses in Proverbs 22:17-24:22. We have included both selections from Proverbs and *The Instructions of Amenemope* for this Storytime Tea.

Read through the passages below, and see if you can spot any parallels yourself!



Hieratic Ostracum with the beginning of "The Wisdom of Amenemope"

Excerpts from *The Instructions of Amenemope*

Instructions of Amenemope:

Chapter 1:

Give your years and hear what is said,
Give your mind over to their interpretation:
It is profitable to put them in your heart,
But woe to him that neglects them!
Let them rest in the shrine of your insides
That they may act as a lock in your heart;
Now when there comes a storm of words,
They will be a mooring post on your tongue.

If you spend a lifetime with these things in
your heart,
You will find it good fortune;
You will discover my words to be a
treasure house of life,
And your body will flourish upon earth.

Chapter 2 (Excerpt):

Beware of stealing from a miserable man
And of raging against the cripple.
Do not stretch out your hand to touch an
old man,
Nor snip at the words of an elder.
Don't let yourself be involved in a
fraudulent business,
Not desire the carrying out of it;
Do not get tired because of being
interfered with,
Nor return an answer on your own.
The evildoer, throw him <in> the canal,
And he will bring back its slime.

Proverbs 22:17-29

(King James Version):

17 Bow down thine ear, and hear the
words of the wise, and apply thine heart
unto my knowledge.

18 For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep
them within thee; they shall withal be fitted
in thy lips.

19 That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have
made known to thee this day, even to thee.

20 Have not I written to thee excellent
things in counsels and knowledge,

21 That I might make thee know the
certainty of the words of truth; that thou
mightest answer the words of truth to
them that send unto thee?

22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor:
neither oppress the afflicted in the gate:

23 For the Lord will plead their cause, and
spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

24 Make no friendship with an angry man;
and with a furious man thou shalt not go:

25 Lest thou learn his ways, and get a
snare to thy soul.

26 Be not thou one of them that strike
hands, or of them that are sureties for
debts.

27 If thou hast nothing to pay, why should
he take away thy bed from under thee?

28 Remove not the ancient landmark,
which thy fathers have set.

29 Seest thou a man diligent in his
business? he shall stand before kings; he
shall not stand before mean men.

Excerpts from *The Instructions of Amenemope*

Instructions of Amenemope:

Chapter 3 (Excerpt):

Do not get into a quarrel with the argumentative man
Nor incite him with words;
Proceed cautiously before an opponent,
And give way to an adversary;
Sleep on it before speaking,
For a storm come forth like fire in hay is
The hot-headed man in his appointed time.

Chapter 6 (Excerpt):

Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land,
Nor alter the position of the measuring line;
Do not be greedy for a plot of land,
Nor overturn the boundaries of a widow.

As for the road in the field worn down by time,
He who takes it violently for fields,
If he traps by deceptive attestations,
Will be lassoed by the might of the moon.

Chapter 9 (Excerpt):

Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man,
Nor approach him to converse.
Safeguard your tongue from answering your superior,
And take care not to speak against him.
Do not allow him to cast words only to entrap you,
And be not too free in your reply;
With a man of your own station discuss the reply;
And take care of speaking thoughtlessly;
When a man's heart is upset, words travel faster
Than wind and rain.

Proverbs 23:1-11

(King James Version):

- 1 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:
- 2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.
- 3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.
- 4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.
- 5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.
- 6 Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:
- 7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.
- 8 The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.
- 9 Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.
- 10 Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless:
- 11 For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.