

The Prince and the Sphinx

There was once a Prince in Egypt called Thutmose, who was a son of Pharaoh Amenhotep, and the grandson of Thutmose III who succeeded the great Queen Hatshepsut. He had many brothers and half-brothers, and because he was Pharaoh's favorite son they were forever plotting against him. Usually these plots were to make Pharaoh think that Thutmose was unworthy or unsuitable to succeed him; sometimes they were attempts to make the people or the priests believe that Thutmose was cruel or extravagant or did not honor the gods and so would make a bad ruler of Egypt; but once or twice the plots were aimed at his very life.

All this made Thutmose troubled and unhappy. He spent less and less of his time at Thebes or Memphis with Pharaoh's court, and more and more frequently rode on expeditions into Upper Egypt or across the desert to the seven great oases. And even when Pharaoh commanded his presence, or his position demanded that he must attend some great festival, he would slip away whenever he could with a few trusted followers, or even alone and in disguise, to hunt on the edge of the desert.

Thutmose was skilled in all manly exercises. He was a Bowman who could plant arrow after arrow in the center of the target; he was a skilled charioteer, and his horses were faster than the wind. Sometimes he would course antelopes for miles across the sandy stretches of desert; at others he would seek out the savage lions in their lairs among the rocks far up above the banks of the Nile.

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One day, when the court was in residence at Memphis for the great festival of Re at Heliopolis a few miles further down the Nile, Thutmose escaped from all the pomp and pageantry to hunt on the edge of the desert. He took with him only two servants, and he drove his own chariot up the steep road past Saqqara where the great Step Pyramid of Djoser stands, and

away through the scrub and stunted trees where the cultivated land by the Nile faded into the stony waste and the stretches of sand and rock of the great Libyan desert.

They set off at the first glimmer of dawn so that they might have as much time as possible before the great heat of midday, and they coursed the gazelle northwards over the desert for many miles, parallel to the Nile but some miles away from it.

By the time the sun grew too hot for hunting Thutmose and his two followers had reached a point not very far away from the great Pyramids of Giza which the Pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty had built over twelve hundred years before.

They stopped to rest under some palm trees. But presently Thutmose, desiring to be alone and wishing to make his prayer to the great god Harmachis, entered his chariot and drove away over the desert, bidding his servants wait for him.

Away sped Thutmose, for the sand was firm and smooth, and at last he drew near to the three pyramids of Khufu, Khafra and Menkaura towering up towards the sky, the burning sun of midday flashing on their golden peaks and glittering down their polished sides like ladders of light leading up to the Boat of Re as it sailed across the sky.

Thutmose gazed in awe at these man-made mountains of stone. But most of all his attention was caught by a gigantic head and neck of stone that rose out of the sand between the greatest of the pyramids and a nearly-buried mortuary temple of huge squared stone blocks that stood on either side of the stone causeway leading from the distant Nile behind him right to the foot of the second pyramid - that of the Pharaoh Khafra.

This was a colossal carving of Harmachis the god of the rising sun, in the form of a lion with the head of a Pharaoh of Egypt - the form he had taken when he became the hunter of the followers of Set. Khafra had caused this 'sphinx' to be carved out of an outcrop of solid rock that happened to rise above the sand near the processional causeway leading from the Nile to

his great pyramid. And he had bidden his sculptors shape the head and face of Harmachis in the likeness of his own.

During the long centuries since Khafra had been laid to rest in his pyramid the sands of the desert had blown against the Sphinx until it was almost buried. Thutmose could see no more than its head and shoulders, and a little ridge in the desert to mark the line of its back. For a long while he stood looking up into the majestic face of the Sphinx, crowned with the royal crown of Egypt that had the cobra's head on its brow and which held in place the folds of embroidered linen which kept the sun from head and neck - only here the folds were of stone and only the head of the serpent fitted onto the carved rock was of gold.

"...he gazed up at the Sphinx & prayed to Hermachis for help in all his troubles."

The noonday sun beat mercilessly down upon Thutmose as he gazed up at the Sphinx and prayed to Harmachis for help in all his troubles.

Suddenly it seemed to him that the great stone image began to stir. It heaved and struggled as if trying in vain to throw off the sand which buried its body and paws, and the eyes were no longer carved stone inlaid with lapis lazuli, but shone with life and vision as they looked down upon him. Then the Sphinx spoke to him in a great voice, and yet kindly as a father speaks to his son.

"Look upon me, Thutmose, Prince of Egypt, and know that I am Harmachis your father - the father of all Pharaohs of the Upper and Lower Lands. It rests with you to become Pharaoh indeed and wear upon your head the Double Crown of South and North; it rests with you whether or not you sit-upon the throne of Egypt, and whether the peoples of the world come and kneel before you in homage. If you indeed become Pharaoh whatever is produced by the Two Lands shall be yours, together with the tribute from all the countries of the world. Besides all this, long years of life, health and strength shall be yours.

"Thutmose, my face is turned towards you, my heart inclines to you to bring you good things, your spirit shall be wrapped in mine. But see how the sand has closed in round me on every

side: it smothers me, it holds me down, it hides me from your eyes. Promise me that you will do all that a good son should do for his father; prove to me that you are indeed my son and will help me. Draw near to me, and I will be with you always, I will guide you and make you great."

Then, as Thutmose stepped forward the sun seemed to shine from the eyes of Harmachis the Sphinx so brightly that they dazzled him and the world went black and spun round him so that he fell insensible on the sand.

When he recovered the sun was sinking towards the summit of Khafra's pyramid and the shadow of the Sphinx lay over him.

Slowly he rose to his feet, and the vision he had seen came rushing back into his mind as he gazed at the great shape half-hidden in the sand which was already turning pink and purple in the evening light.

"Harmachis, my father!" he cried, "I call upon you and all the gods of Egypt to bear witness to my oath. If I become Pharaoh, the first act of my reign shall be to free this your image from the sand and build a shrine to you and set in it a stone telling in the sacred writing of Khem of your command and how I fulfilled it."

Then Thutmose turned to seek his chariot; and a moment later his servants, who had been anxiously searching for him, came riding up.

Thutmose rode back to Memphis, and from that day all went well with him. Very soon Amenhotep the Pharaoh proclaimed him publicly as heir to the throne; and not very long afterwards Thutmose did indeed become King of Egypt one of her greatest Kings.

The Afterward

Just a hundred and fifty years ago - 3,230 years after Thutmose IV became Pharaoh of Egypt - the Sphinx, again buried to the neck in sand, was dug out by an early archaeologist. Between its paws he found the remains of a shrine in which stood a red granite tablet fourteen feet high. Inscribed on it in hieroglyphs was the whole story of the Prince and the Sphinx. The tablet also tells us that it was set there in fulfillment of his vow by Pharaoh Thutmose IV in the third month of the first year of his reign, after he had cleared away all the sand which hid from sight Harmachis, the great Sphinx that had been made in the days of Khafra, when the world was young.