

The Sorcerer's Apprentice (extract)

Long ago there lived a man who knew many secrets. He lived in Egypt's sacred city of Memphis and he was a priest of the goddess Isis. He had spent twenty-three years down in the tombs and catacombs beneath the city. During his underground life, he had learned many spells and magical rituals. When he emerged from his long period of study, people soon understood that he was a master of the mysterious arts. His greatest trick was to ride on the back of crocodiles, using them as his personal ferry across the great River Nile. He was never short of work; people came to him when they had problems with money, love, health, family or farming. He performed services for both the rich and the poor, and he asked clients to pay him only for what they could. He himself became both wealthy and famous. His name was Pancrates, but most people knew him merely as The Sorcerer.

Now, this famous sorcerer had a magic helper. It was an ordinary broom which he dressed in clothes; including a hat and a linen smock. It spent most of the time propped up in the corner of his kitchen, but when Pancrates muttered a secret charm, it suddenly became alive. The broom strutted about on two legs and grew arms to perform tasks like fetching buckets of water from the well or cleaning the floor. It would even go to the barrel and pull a tankard of beer for its master. When he had no further use for the magic helper, the sorcerer would snap his fingers and the helpful broom would go back to corner and turn back into an ordinary stick with some brushes on the end.



As you can imagine, the magic broom was a trick that impressed almost everyone. It was indeed extremely useful, but not much company for its master. The sorcerer lacked a human companion. He did not marry, and as he grew older, he began to fret that his secrets would die with him. He decided to look for a young apprentice. His friend the school master told him of a bright young boy who was looking for a career that would take him far. When the boy left school, he became the sorcerer's apprentice.

He promised to teach the boy all his secrets in as short a time as ten years. Meanwhile, the boy should be his helper. There was plenty of work for him to do; including collecting ingredients from the fields and river banks, and mixing potions in the house. In this way he became familiar with many of the strange contents of magical preparations; including mouse droppings and spider's eggs, poppy seeds, juniper berries, vinegar and donkey's milk.