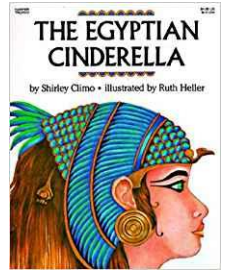


## The Egyptian Cinderella



Long ago, in the ancient land of Egypt, where the green water of the Nile River flows into the blue water of the Mediterranean Sea, lived a young maiden named Rhodopis. Rhodopis was born in Greece but was kidnapped by pirates and carried down into Egypt where she was sold into slavery. Her owner turned out to be a kind old man: always willing to help others.

However, he spent most of his time under a tree sleeping and therefore, did not see how much the Egyptian servant girls teased and taunted Rhodopis.

For Rhodopis looked different. The servant girls had brown eyes, whereas hers were green. Their skin glowed like copper, but her pale skin burned red beneath the sun.

“Rosy Rhodopis!” scoffed the servant girls, hissing her name between their teeth. Embarrassed, Rhodopis pretended not to hear, but she blushed rosier than ever. The kind old man never saw them ordering her to do their bidding,

“Mend my robe!”

“I’m hungry, Rhodopis! Bake the bread!”

Rhodopis found friends among the animals instead. Sometimes, if she had finished all her chores, she would dance for them. She twirled so lightly that her tiny bare feet scarcely touched the ground. One evening her master awakened to see her dance.

“Such a gift deserves a reward!” He tugged his whiskers, thinking and then declared, “you shall go barefoot no longer.”

Her master gave her a pair of dainty slippers. The soles were of real leather; the toes were gilded with rose-red gold. Now when Rhodopis danced, her feet sparkled like fireflies. But this made the servant girls more jealous than ever.

Word arrived that the Pharaoh, Amasis was holding court in Memphis and all in the kingdom were invited. Rhodopis knew there would be dancing, singing and lots of wonderful food and so wanted to go. If she was not a slave, then she could have gone! As the servant girls prepared to leave in their finest clothes, they teased her and gave her even more chores.

“Wash the linen, weed the garden. . . .”

Rhodopis repeated the servant girls demands. When suddenly a shadow fell on the water. A great falcon, the symbol of the God Horus, circled in the sky with wings spread so wide that they blotted out the sun. The falcon swooped down low and soared away with one of her marvellous slippers dangling from his talons.

Rhodopis was in awe, for she knew it was the God Horus who had taken her shoe. Now, with only one slipper, she tucked it away in her tunic.

A short while after, Amasis, Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt, was sitting on his throne looking out upon his people and feeling very bored. He much preferred to be riding across the desert in his chariot! Suddenly, the falcon swooped down and dropped the rose-red golden slipper into his lap. Surprised, but knowing it was

a symbol of the God Horus, he immediately sent out a decree that all maidens in Egypt must try on the slipper. The owner would become his queen!

The longer Amasis searched, the more determined he became. He summoned the royal barge and vowed to visit every landing along the Nile. Trumpets blared and oarsmen rowed to the beat of gongs. The din was so dreadful that Rhodopis fled in alarm, but the servant girls ran to the water's edge. Amasis held up the rose-red slipper. The servant girls recognised that shoe (and knew its owner too). They each cramped their feet and curled their toes and squeezed with all their might. If they could wear the slipper, then they could be Queen.

Amasis spied Rhodopis hiding in the bushes. He demanded that she try on the slipper. He slipped the tiny shoe on her foot with ease.

"But Rhodopis is a slave!" protested one of the servant girls, "she is not even Egyptian".

"She is the most Egyptian of all," the Pharaoh declared, "for her eyes are as green as the Nile, her hair as feathery as papyrus and her skin the pink of a lotus flower."

The Pharaoh led Rhodopis to the royal barge, and with every step, her rose-red slippers winked and sparkled in the proud sun.