

Rhodopis (The Egyptian Cinderella)

adapted from the Strabo, historian, 64 BC – 24 AD

Long ago in the land of Egypt, land of the green Nile and the blue Mediterranean and the rising sun, there lived a slave girl named Rhodopis. Rhodopis was born in Greece, but had been kidnapped by pirates and sold into Egyptian slavery. The man who bought her was a kind old man, but he spent most of his time sleeping and never saw how much Rhodopis suffered at the hands of his other servants, who teased her endlessly. Their hair was straight and black and elegant; her hair was golden, curly and coarse. Their eyes were brown and black and deep, but hers were green and bright. Their skin glowed like copper and bronze and sand, but Rhodopis had fair skin that burnt in the sun. They made her do all their work while the old man slept.

"Go to the river and wash the clothes," "Mend my robe," "Chase the geese from the garden," "Bake the bread," they would shout at her.

Rhodopis had only animals for friends. She had trained the birds to eat from her hand, a monkey to sit on her shoulder, and the old hippopotamus would slide up on the bank out of the mud to be closer to her. At the end of the day if she wasn't too tired she would go down to the river to be with the animals, and if she had any energy left from the hard day's work she would dance and sing for them.

One evening she had more energy than usual, as the day had been particularly cool. Even her master had been enjoying the fine weather, and had fallen asleep under a tree near the river. When the day was done, Rhodopis went down to the river near her animals, and danced and sang so lightly and so well that her feet barely touched the

ground, and the old man woke from his sleep and listened to her singing. He admired her dancing, and felt that one so talented should not be without shoes. He ordered her a special pair of slippers. They were soft and a delicious rose-red color. Now the servant girls teased her even more, so jealous they were of her beautiful red slippers.

A little while after this, word arrived that the Pharaoh was holding court in Memphis and all in the kingdom were invited. There was to be dancing and singing and feasting for days on end, and naturally Rhodopis wanted to go, to dance and sing with the others. But it was not to be. For as the servant girls prepared to leave in their finest clothes they turned to Rhodopis and gave her more chores to do before they returned, and it would be impossible for her to get them all done before the court began.

They poled their raft away leaving a sad Rhodopis on the bank. As she began to wash the clothes in the river she sang a sad little song—"wash the linen, weed the garden, grind the grain." Rhodopis washed and beat the clothes harder than she ought, for she was very disappointed not to be going. The splashing of the water wet Rhodopis's slippers. She quickly grabbed them up, took them off and placed them in the sun to dry. As she was continuing with her chores the sky darkened and as she looked up she saw a falcon sweep down, snatch one of her slippers, and fly away. Rhodopis was in awe for she knew it was the god Horus who had taken her shoe. Rhodopis tucked the other slipper away in her tunic and went back to work, wondering what Horus' appearance could mean.

Now the Pharaoh, Amasis, Pharaoh of all Egypt was just beginning to hold court, sitting on his throne looking out over the people, and feeling very bored. He much preferred to

be riding across the desert in his chariot, and the dancing was uninspired. He longed for a distraction.

Suddenly the falcon swooped down and dropped the rose-red golden slipper in his lap. The Pharaoh caught up the slipper and examined it closely, for he knew this was a sign from the god Horus. He stared at the slipper until he had deciphered its meaning, and then sent out a decree that all maidens in Egypt must try on the slipper, and that he would take the owner to be his Queen, for so Horus had decreed. And so it happened that by the time the servant girls arrived the celebrations had ended, and Pharaoh had left by chariot in search of the owner of the red-rose slipper.

After searching all through the large cities and not finding the owner, Pharaoh he called for his barge and began to travel the Nile pulling into every landing, ordering maidens to try on the slipper. Soon he came to the house of Rhodopis' master, and when Rhodopis heard the sounds of the gong, the trumpets blaring, and saw the purple silk sails, she hid, fearful of what it could mean. The other servant girls ran to the landing to try on the shoe while Rhodopis hid in the rushes.

Of course, the moment that the other servant girls saw the shoe they recognized that it belonged to Rhodopis, but said nothing, such was their envy and hatred of her. Yet try as they might, they could not force their feet into the slipper. While they were failing and pretending to succeed, the Pharaoh spied Rhodopis hiding in the rushes and asked her to try on the slipper. She slid her tiny foot into the slipper and then pulled the other from her tunic.

Then Pharaoh knew that she had been decreed to be his wife by the Gods, and pronounced that she would be his queen. The servant girls cried out that she was a

slave and not even Egyptian, and that her hair, eyes, skin and clothes were unsuitable; any of them would be a more fitting Queen.

But the Pharaoh said: "She is the most Egyptian of all...for her eyes are as green as the Nile, her hair like papyrus, and her skin as pink as the lotus flower."