

## The Egyptian Cinderella

retold by JB

*The Ancient Egyptian version of Cinderella where her name is Rhodopis is considered the oldest version of the story; the literature was first recorded by the Roman historian Strabo in the first century BC. (The Egyptian Cinderella, Shirly Climo, illust. Ruth Heller, Harper Collins, 1989.)*

Long ago in the Ancient land of Egypt where the Nile River flows into the Mediterranean Sea lived a young maiden named Rhodopis. Rhodopis means rosy cheeked and she did have lovely rosy cheeks. She was born in Greece but was taken by pirates and carried down into Egypt where she was sold as a slave. Luckily for Rhodopis her owner turned out to be a kind old man. But he also spent most of his time under a giant fig tree sleeping. He did not see how the other servant girls in the house taunted and teased Rhodopis.

You see Rhodopis looked different. Their hair was straight and black while hers was golden and curly. They had brown eyes and hers were green. Their skin was dark, but she had pale skin. She was also smaller than them, with tiny hands and feet.

They made her work hard shouting at her all day:

“Wash the clothes, Rhodopis.”

“Feed the geese, Rhodopis.”

“Bake the bread, Rhodopis”

Poor Rhodopis she was homesick for her own country her family and friends. In Egypt she had no friends except the old hippopotamus in the river Nile. At the end of her long tiring day she would go down to the river Nile and dance while the hippopotamus watched her and splashed in the river. She danced her troubles away.

One evening her master saw her dancing. He admired her skill and grace. He felt that one so talented should not dance without shoes. He ordered her a special pair of slippers. The shoes were gilded turquoise and gold and the soles were leather. They were beautiful slippers. Rhodopis loved them even though the other servant girls were jealous and hated her even more.

One day word arrived that the Pharaoh of Upper Egypt, who was handsome and unmarried, was holding court in Memphis and everyone in the kingdom was invited. Oh, how Rhodopis wanted to go with the servant girls. She knew there would be music for dancing and lots of wonderful food.

But the other servant girls told her she had to stay.

“Someone has to stay and do the chores. Make sure you get everything done before we get back,” they said to her as they set off and left Rhodopis in the house.

All day long Rhodopis was close to tears as she went about her duties. She washed the clothes. She fed the geese. She baked the bread. At the end of that long, tiring day she went down to the river and put on her turquoise sandals and began to dance. She danced and danced with tears streaming down her cheeks.

The hippopotamus seemed to sense her sadness because it splashed more than usual and the water splashed up onto her sandals.

Rhodopis feared the water would damage her sandals so she quickly took them off and placed them in the sun to dry. Before she could stop it a falcon swooped down and carried one of her turquoise sandals away.

The Pharaoh was sitting on his throne looking out over the people having fun at his party and as he watched the lovely young ladies dancing he wondered if he should choose one as his wife. It was just at that moment that the falcon swooped down and dropped the turquoise sandal right in his lap. The pharaoh took this to be a sign and there and then decided he would marry the owner of the turquoise sandal. All the young ladies at the party tried the sandal on but it did not fit any of them.

The next day the pharaoh took his chariot and his many servants and went in search of the owner of the turquoise sandal. It was far too small for every young lady who tried it on. When he arrived at the house where Rhodopis lived the servant girls told Rhodopis to stay out of sight because they knew the sandal belonged to her. They tried the sandal on, each one trying hard to make it fit but the sandal was too small which they already knew because they had tried it on at the party.

But of course it was a grand occasion having the pharaoh call at the house and so the Rhodopis' owner was not asleep under the fig tree that day. He saw the sandal and knew it belonged to Rhodopis. He called her from the kitchen at once and told her to try the sandal on which she did. . She slid her tiny foot into the sandal and then pulled the other from her tunic.

The Pharaoh pronounced that she would be his queen. The servant girls cried out that she was not even Egyptian.

But the pharaoh said, "Her eyes are as green as the River Nile. Her skin is as pink as the lotus flower. Of course she is Egyptian. She shall be my queen."

And so they were married and the slave girl, Rhodopis, became Queen.