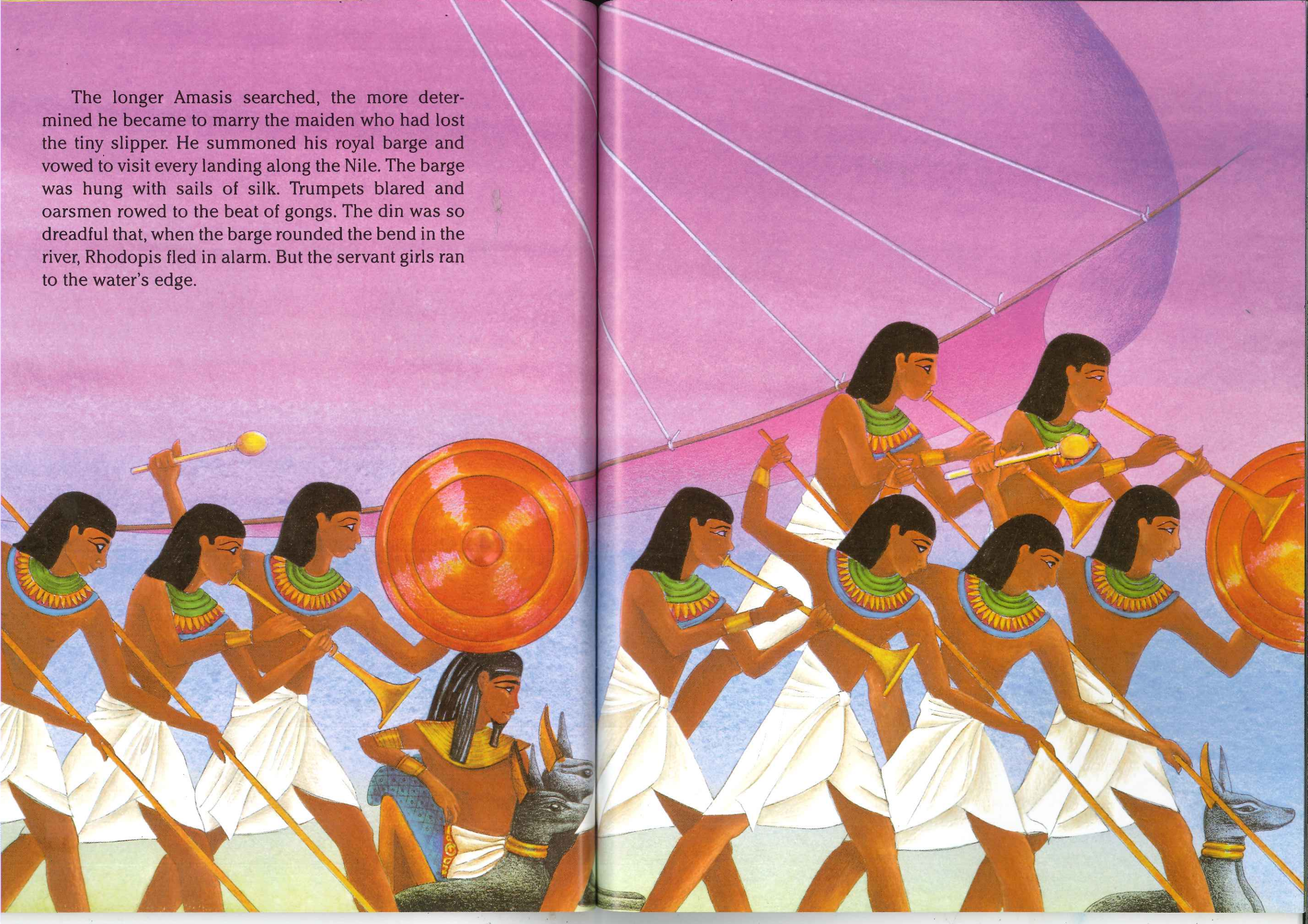


The longer Amasis searched, the more determined he became to marry the maiden who had lost the tiny slipper. He summoned his royal barge and vowed to visit every landing along the Nile. The barge was hung with sails of silk. Trumpets blared and oarsmen rowed to the beat of gongs. The din was so dreadful that, when the barge rounded the bend in the river, Rhodopis fled in alarm. But the servant girls ran to the water's edge.



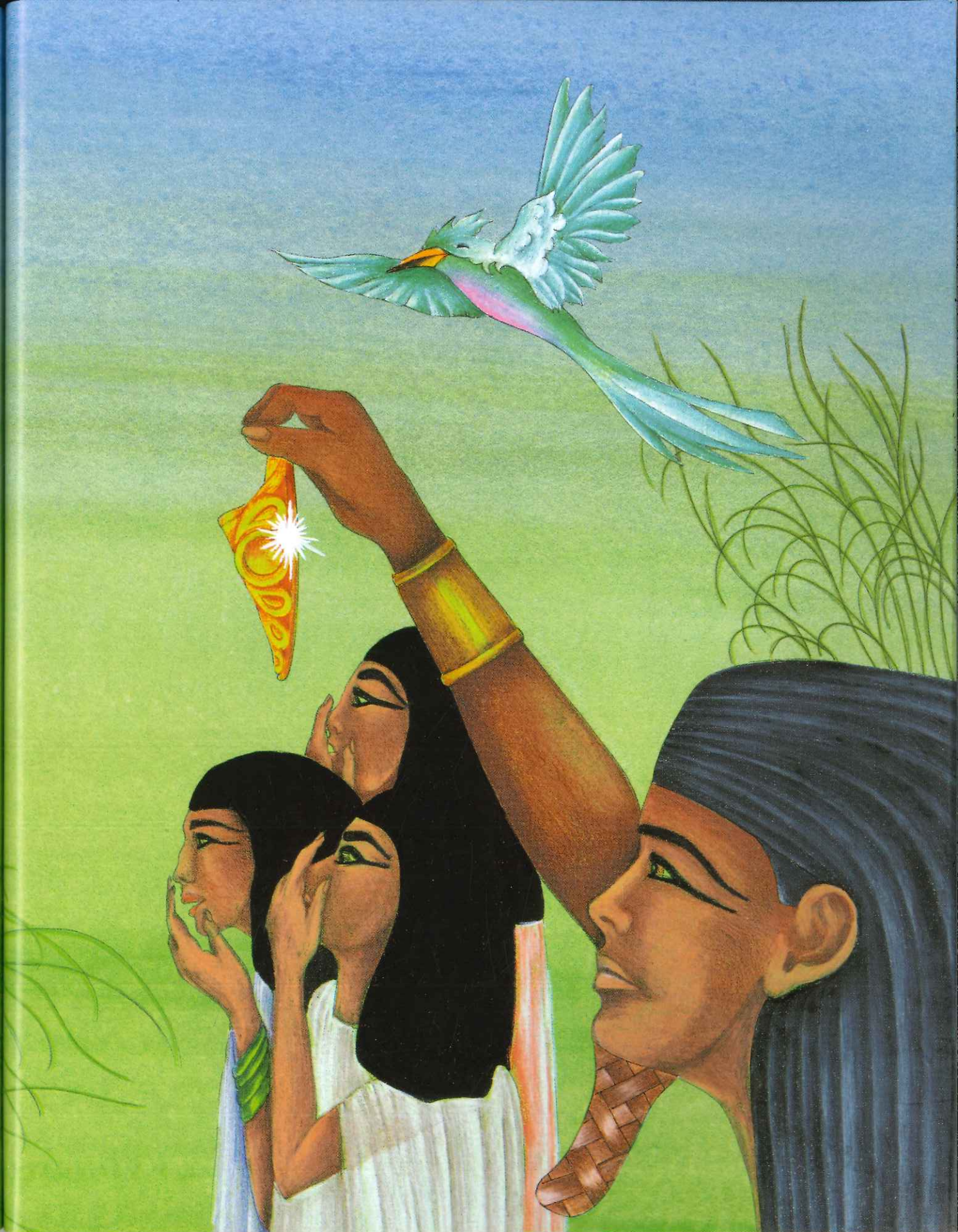
"Now we will see the Pharaoh!" cried Kipa.

Amasis held up the rose-red slipper. "Whoever can wear this shoe shall be my queen."

The servant girls knew that shoe, and knew its owner, too. Yet they clapped their hands over their mouths and said nothing. If one of them could wear it . . .

First Kipa, then the others, tried to put on the slipper. Each cramped her foot and curled her toes and squeezed until tears ran down her cheeks. Still her heel hung over.

"Enough!" said Amasis wearily. He would have set sail again had he not chanced to see Rhodopis peering through the rushes.





"Come!" he commanded. "You must try this rose-red slipper."

The servant girls gawked openmouthed as the Pharaoh knelt before Rhodopis. He slipped the tiny shoe on her foot with ease. Then Rhodopis pulled its mate from the folds of her tunic.

"Behold!" cried Amasis. "In all this land there is none so fit to be queen!"

"But Rhodopis is a slave!" protested one of the servant girls.

Kipa sniffed. "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 sun.



Author's Note

The tale of Rhodopis (ra-doh-pes) and the rose-red slippers is one of the world's oldest Cinderella stories. It was first recorded by the Roman historian Strabo in the first century B.C.

The story is both fact and fable. Rhodopis is believed to have been born in northern Greece, kidnapped by pirates as a child, and sold to a rich man on the island of Samos. One of her fellow slaves was a homely little man named Aesop, who told her wonderful fables about animals.

When Rhodopis was almost grown, she was taken to Egypt and bought by a man named Charaxos. Her new master was also Greek, and he gave many gifts and favors to Rhodopis. In those days, a fortunate slave might live far better than a hired servant. The servants, although free, were poor and lived in mud huts, while a chosen slave enjoyed the comforts of the master's villa.

The existence of the rose-red slippers is possible. Ancient Egyptian gold was sometimes mixed with iron, which gave it a reddish hue. In retelling this story, I preferred to have the gilded slippers stolen by a falcon, although some references name the bird as an eagle. Horus, Egyptian sky god and deity of the living pharaohs, was believed to appear on earth as a falcon.

What *is* fact is that a Greek slave girl, Rhodopis, married the Pharaoh Amasis (ah-may-ses) (Dynasty XXVI, 570–526 B.C.) and became his queen.

