



She polished the shoes on the hem of her tunic until the rosy gold glittered in the sun. Then she carefully put them on the bank behind her.

“Wash the linen, weed the garden . . .” Rhodopis began again, when suddenly a shadow fell on the water. Rhodopis jumped up. A great falcon, the symbol of the god Horus, circled in the sky with wings spread so wide that they blotted out the sun.

“Greetings to you, Proud Horus,” Rhodopis murmured. She bowed her head and felt a rush of air on the back of her neck.



When Rhodopis dared to lift her eyes, she saw the falcon soar away. Dangling from his talons was one of her beautiful slippers. "Stop!" she pleaded. "Come back!"

But the bird did not heed her. He flew toward the sun until he was no more than a dark speck against the gold.

Rhodopis bit her tongue. One shoe was worse than none at all. Now she'd have to dance like a stork, hopping about on one foot, and even the monkey would laugh. Rhodopis tucked the slipper into her tunic and returned to her laundry, salting the river with her tears.



After Rhodopis had lost sight of the falcon, the mighty bird followed the course of the Nile to the city of Memphis, to the square where the Pharaoh was holding court. There the falcon watched and waited.

The Pharaoh's name was Amasis. On his head he wore the red-and-white crown of the Two Egypts. The double crown was heavy and pinched his ears. He preferred driving his chariot fast as the wind to sitting on the throne. Amasis yawned.

