

To Flee Destiny

by Southern_Witch_69

Helen Ainsworth flees England as quickly as possible and finds herself in a situation that, while leaving her destitute at first, will lead to a better life than the one she left behind.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 1

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This is a story that I'm writing for my friend, Wartcap, as a birthday gift. I was unable to post it for her birthday, which was back on February the 15th, as I had issues to deal with here, but she gave me the premise that she wanted, and now I'm doing my best to write this gift for her. It's quite difficult for me because it deals with things that I'm unfamiliar with, but I'll try to do a little research to make things more believable. However, I apologize for anything that might seem out of place. The chapters will be very short, and I'll update often until it's complete.

Thanks go to Soul Bound for beta reading this for me.

Helen Ainsworth stood on the deck of the ship and gazed out towards the shadowy horizon, her long, dark curls blowing about in the cool evening wind. She shivered slightly and wrapped her thick cloak more tightly about her body. It wasn't only the wintry cold that had her body quivering. She'd just narrowly escaped a fate worse than death, and part of her worried that another ship would overtake them and snatch her away from her pending freedom.

Luckily, she'd met Captain James MacArthur in the small, rundown inn at the port. She'd been trying to explain to the innkeeper that she needed to find safe passage on a ship to any destination that would take her away from England when a ruffian had mistaken her for a serving wench. Even now, her cheeks flushed angrily as she thought of the man's meaty hands pulling her against his stinking, filthy body. Mister MacArthur had swiftly intervened, daring the man to further attempt to molest her, stating that she was obviously a lady, not some commoner. Her relief was short lived, as he'd immediately pulled her into a dark corner and started questioning her, having overheard her plight.

It appeared that he was willing to give her safe passage to a booming trade town in Southern America, New Orleans to be exact, as he was bringing some cargo that way. In exchange, he'd asked her what she was willing to give. The man might be an honest ship captain, but it was apparent that he wasn't above doing side dealings. Fortunately for her, the meager amount of money that she'd had in her purse and a couple of the expensive gowns she'd been able to hurriedly pack were enough for the man, though she was certain he would have been satisfied with access to her body only.

Immediately after, he'd escorted her onto his ship and fed her the first full-course meal she'd had in days. Thus far, his promises that not one of his crew would molest, harm, or bother her in any way had been kept. However, now that she'd given him two of her four dresses, this included the one she had on, and all of her money, which she'd received from the sale of her steed, she had no idea where she would go when they made port or how she'd survive. She supposed she could always sell her other gown for a small price, but from what she'd heard of the port of New Orleans, it hadn't many people who might be interested in such a needless luxury. She hoped that those words were simply rumors. She couldn't bear to allow liberties with her body to survive—she'd starve first! In truth, she would be willing to seek employment as a scullery maid, governess, cook, or housekeeper—any menial job that would keep her in a dry, warm bed and keep her from the clutches of those she'd left behind.

A thought occurred to her. She could offer to draw portraits for people in exchange for food or money. Besides her clothing and a silver chain with a locket left to her by her mother, she had her pastels and charcoals, which she could use to create a likeness of anyone or anything. She had many sheets upon which to draw them, having been unable to part from them when she'd fled her home. The collection of past works she carried should be proof enough to prospective customers that she could indeed draw well. Feeling a little better about her situation, she made her way inside to see if the captain had left any food for her in her cabin.

"Hello, Mister MacArthur," she greeted upon entering.

"My lady," he said with a small nod and warm grin. "Please call me James."

Helen bowed her head slightly in acquiescence as she noted the sincerity in his dark eyes. "Very well, James," she said with a smile, thinking that he would be a very handsome man if his face lacked the three jagged slash marks marring its smooth flesh.

"I've some tea and biscuits to tide you over until Cook is able to finish tonight's meal." He pointed towards the window. "There's to be bad weather tonight, lass, and we had to prepare the ship first, we did."

"Oh?"

"Aye."

"I cannot convey how much I appreciate this, sir. Had I not met you, I don't know what would have become of me." She bit her lip to keep from wincing at the memory of her experience at the inn and the horrid man's foul breath as he'd attempted to kiss her.

He gave her a lopsided smile and said, "It's nothing, my lady. I shall return shortly, and I must warn you that things are likely to be a tad rough tonight. The sea is sometimes unforgiving." At her alarmed look, he hurried to say, "Fear not, lass. Don't worry those brown eyes of yours. The lads in me crew are stout and know the business of keeping the ship afloat."

"Thank you again," she murmured, unable to not worry, as she'd never been a good swimmer and wouldn't last a minute if lost in a raging sea. The worst thing about it was that the skies she'd just seen had looked very peaceful. At least he had warned her so that she could prepare herself.

Much later, when the promised violence bared its teeth, she huddled in the corner of her bed and prayed to God—any deity listening—that she would see dry land again and live. She also prayed for the captain and his crew and couldn't help but wonder if this storm was set upon them as punishment for taking a fleeing woman on board. She couldn't live with herself if harm came to someone on account of her. She didn't have long to ponder this, for in the next instant, a loud clap of thunder boomed nearby, causing her to startle and lose her balance. Just at that moment, a large wave slapped against the side of the ship, making it sway violently and tumbling her out of the bed. Helen heard the thud of her head hitting the floor before all went black.

Southern's Notes: The poor dear is having a rough time of it. It will get better soon.