

Chapter One

Abigail yawned and stretched. She was about as bored as she could possibly be. Sewing was nothing to her but an annoying chore. Aunt Aggie insisted that the ability to sew a straight seam and complete a neat sampler were absolutely necessary to making a good marriage. Not that Abi was interested in marriage, any way. At seventeen, she knew that she should be. Most girls her age were busy looking for the right match, hoping to find a man that would treat them reasonably well and earn a prosperous living.

Abi knew that her Aunt fretted that she would end up a spinster, and often caught her wringing her hands and mopping her brow in frustration and worry. This usually happened when she caught Abi throwing a ball with her brother or picking up her skirts to climb a tree. Auntie was convinced that these unladylike activities would doom Abigail to a life without her own husband, home and children.

To Abi, marriage was akin to being thrown in prison, though the accommodations would likely be nicer. The fact that she would have to obey a husband, cook, clean and fetch for a husband held no appeal for her. Obeying her father was difficult enough, but to be married to and controlled by some man she would probably barely know was just unthinkable.

Abigail's plan was to push every suitor away by being rude and "unladylike". Letting a man know that she could read, cipher and speak a bit of Greek and Latin were also sure to send most young men running scared. Intelligence and education in a woman were to be feared, not admired.

As these thoughts ran through Abi's head, she couldn't help but smile. She loved Auntie very much, and knew her plan would drive the poor woman to distraction, but it was, afterall, her life she was looking after.

She sighed heavily. She knew her brother, Thomas, was out on the bay with friends fishing from the small dorry her father kept at the dock to shuttle back and forth between his ship anchored in the bay and the shore. While she was cooped up in the house, Thomas was out enjoying the first warm day of spring.

She stared out the window at the new green of leaves and grass and a wave of sadness hit her. What would become of her? Was she destined to have to abide by all the rules she hated forever? Her dreams were to spend her days out of doors. She longed to smell the salt breeze off the bay and to walk the wharf, taking in the noise of ships unlading, gulls squawking and dockworkers yelling.

Then she would...

She would what? What good could she possibly do wandering about the docks in her calico? She would be chased home on sight, with warnings that if she was “seen down here again, I’ll tell the Cap’n,” meaning her father. That was something she definitely wanted to avoid.

For father worried too. He had done the best he could raising Thomas and her after her mother died. A year or so after her mum passed, her widowed and childless Aunt Agatha, her mother’s sister, moved in to take over the household. The Captain felt her presence would help “lend a womanly hand to your upbringing”. She knew that if it weren’t for her Aunt, she and her brother would have been packed off to some other relative. Her father was gone for months on end and had little time or interest in the raising of children.

Abigail couldn’t help but feel that both she and Thomas were proving a disappointment to their father. Every time he came home from sea and caught up on what they had been about since his departure, his face grew more and more grim as the stories were told.

Thomas, supposed to be training for life at sea, much preferred to spend his time wandering about the surrounding countryside with his drawing tools. There he sketched the trees, wildflowers and animals and documented their details and behaviors. His secret dream was to be a “man of science” as he put it, and study at university in Boston.

When father asked what Abigail had been engaged in, his eyes began to darken as it became clear that she had not attended any of the parties or socials in town, practiced the pianoforte or even gone to church if she could help it. Rather, she had spent time in the lovely old elm, if weather permitted, or in the turret room if not, reading and dreaming of distant places and destinations far more exotic than Mystic.

In the end, his exhaustion would win over. He would draw a deep breath, puff his cheeks and let out a long, slow, agonized sigh. Invariably, the evening would end with him saying, "Well, what are we going to do with you both? If your poor mother could see you now, she'd never believe what you've gotten up to." Try as he might, he would then smile broadly, ruffle Thomas' hair and pinch her cheek. He loved them both very much, but was witless as to how to mold them into what he, and indeed the entire town, thought they should properly be. With that, he blew out the lamps and clumped up the stairs to his chamber.

Thomas and Abi did the same, relieved that the questioning was over and they could continue their preferred pursuits as soon as their father put out to sea again, which would be soon enough.

Chapter Two

When Abigail was in one of her better moods, she realized that in many ways she was truly fortunate. She still missed her mother deeply, though it had been five years since she died, her life was full of blessings. She and her family lived in a beautiful, large home within sight of the bay. Her father was a successful merchant and captained his own ship, the *Tradewind*. Business had been good, and there was even talk of adding a second ship and a warehouse to his holdings. Even though her father was gone a good portion of the year, when he was home he was a loving man, and when he wasn't, Aunt Aggie, took good care of Abi and her brother.

Still, Abigail chafed at the rules imposed on her. Most of the rules applied only because she was a girl. Her brother escaped most of them and was able to move about the world freely, whereas Abi had to be escorted most everywhere she went.

This had led her to sneak out of the house a time or two in the deep of night to go exploring. One night she was approached and pawed by a drunken shipmate and decided that she had been a bit too adventurous. Were he not so unsteady on his feet due to rum, who knows what would have happened. After that adventure, the last of it's kind, she felt more confined than ever.

She would often beg Thomas to take her with him when he went out, and though Thomas was kind and enjoyed her company, he didn't want to be responsible for her outside the house. He knew she was prone to wander. If she went into the field with him when he was studying his plants and trees, bats and birds, she would prove nothing but an annoyance. At fifteen, he was not interested in being her keeper.

She was free to accompany Aggie on her errands. In fact she was often required to do the marketing with her. Aggie of the ever-sharp eyes never let Abi out of her sight, and had ample advice on how Abi was to behave, and a sharp comment if she didn't behave as expected.

She was also fortunate to have some education beyond the "womanly arts." Free access to her father's library was something she treasured. After a couple of years with a tutor, and with what her mother had taught her, she was free to explore the entire world through the pages of her books. It helped her restlessness for awhile, but the more she read, the more she wanted to see the real Hong Kong, the Eiffel Tower