

Like Love, Like Lightning

As the sun rose over the Cyclamen Sea, the horizon transformed into a sea of pinkish-orange above a vast field of glittering sapphires. *It'll take nearly a fortnight to reach Rose Harbor at this ambling pace*, thought Sam as he looked at his reflection in the water. Sammuel Salt was a well-presented, relatively tall man with a short mop of dirty blond hair that rested above two deep blue eyes and a prominent nose. He had fled Petal Port two days back on the Melancholic Merman, a trading barque he had learned was unfortunately owned by Lord and Lady Mayflower. Captained by Mandon Mayflower, a tall strong man who spoke his orders with such a tone of urgency one would think a man had fallen overboard, the Merman was crewed by a team of twelve. One of whom was Guy, a good friend of Sam's.

Aside from wool, cheeses, and grains, the ship also served as transport for five residents of Petal Port, including himself, and a small party of nobles. Sam had only heard tell of the nobles who seemed to love their cabins more than the view of the sky. Each time this obscure group wished to promenade the deck the commoners were sent down to the hold.

After the sun had fully risen above the waves, the sharp sound of a bell was heard, signaling to the crew and commoners that it was time to break their fast. Sam kept his head down as he made his way below decks, *there's no telling if the Mayflowers have informants within the crew*. It was best to keep a low profile on a ship owned and captained by a family that wanted you dead or in a cell. Leaving Micah, his *little flower* as he called her, behind in Petal Port was hard, but he had no choice.

Yes you did, a voice inside his head leered, *you could have stayed and faced a cell instead of abandoning her*.

It's better this way, Sam countered ignoring the voice, *she doesn't have to live remembering how our love had delivered me to a cell*.

Coward, the voice replied.

He left his thoughts as he entered the cramped mess, where a large long table surrounded by barrels of lemons and some type of pickled fish sat. Hammocks hung between wooden supports, casting interesting shadows facilitated by the low lamp light in the room. After collecting his breakfast of bread and cheese (just a plain cheddar, not one of the fine cheeses the ship carried), he skulked to the far end of the table and sat himself next to his only friend on the boat. Guy was a comely man and as strong as an ox. A crop of messy black hair topped his muscular frame, under it, one could find two resolute brown eyes resting above a small stout nose.

"You thinking bout summat Sam?" Guy asked as Sam sat beside him, his mouth full of dry cheese "You've got that look to you."

"Just thinking about Petal Port, that's all," Sam replied.

"Bah, leave it in the past I say. Thanks to me, you ain't got naught to worry about now."

Guy had been the one who procured Sam's passage aboard the Melancholic Merman, though he had unfortunately forgotten the fact that the Mayflowers wanted Sam safe in a *cell*, not

one of their ships. However, it was easy to blend in with his fellow commoners, as he had not shaved for a week before his departure, and his hair had grown longer and messier because of his neglect. At this point, he was barely recognizable.

“Ever wondered who those noble snobs are up above? Traipsing on deck in their sunshine and sea breeze while we’re sent to swelter down in the hold,” Guy asked interrupting Sam's thoughts.

“Never given ‘em too much thought, but I wouldn’t mind knowing who sends us down to the holds each day.”

“Me and the lads are gonna take a peek at ‘em folk later today, you’d be welcome to join.”

Sam had to ponder this proposal before he replied. He would risk a possible confrontation with Mandon Mayflower if he caught word of this. He couldn’t just risk his cover for an elusive bunch of snobbish nobles. Though if one was Micah... no, there wasn’t any good reason for her to be on this ship, even if...*stop!* It would do no good thinking about her. *And how you abandoned her*, the voice in his head said again. Ignoring the voice, he continued to think. *Coward*, the voice spoke again. *Learning about the nobles is not worth betraying my secrecy*, Sam decided. *Coward* the voice said again, *coward, coward* the voice repeated and repeated. Sam contemplated and in a moment of doubt, he made his final decision.

“I’ll give them noble nobles a look,” Sam said to Guy

“Right. We’ll linger a bit before we head down to the noon meal,” Guy replied before returning his crude wooden plate.

By now the sun had ridden to the center of the sky, emanating a heat so hot Sam felt as if he could collapse and melt at any moment. It was nearing midday and the bell would soon ring. As a soft breeze blew, smelling of salt and sun, Sam wondered how Guy and his mates planned to stay on the open deck. Suddenly a man started retching over the side of the boat. Sam knew, it was time. He rushed over to the retching man. “You’ve gotta keep that in, not out” Sam yelled at the man. *Ting!* The bell sounded signaling the noon meal. Guy detached himself from the small mob as the crew and commoners ambled toward the hold. “Move somewhere else if you're gonna do that!” Guy yelled as the man continued to retch some vile substance. “Move!” Together, Sam and Guy managed to maneuver the sick sailor to an out-of-the-way spot on the starboard side of the ship. Pausing from tending to the sailor, Sam looked up just in time to see a man emerge from the captain's quarters near the bow. Behind the man came a woman. There was something familiar about her posture and the way she walked. Sam focused on her, and, in a moment of astonishment, joy, and melancholy, realized who she was.

Her face was like the sun, her hair a golden sky. Her figure sent forth rays of glorious radiance illuminating the space she occupied with her beauty. Her eyes were a deep lovely green like the stormy sea. There she was. The love of his life. The reason for his woe. Micah Mayflower. The daughter of Lord and Lady Mayflower. Mandon Mayflower's niece. The parents of whom, wanted Sam locked in a cell because they planned to marry their daughter to some rich inland lord and didn’t want him to get in the way. He had done nothing wrong but love. Yet still,

the Mayflowers held the power to decree whatever they wanted. Luckily enough, they hadn't ordered the whole city to chase him down and bring them his head.

Sam wanted to run to Micah, to hold her. He wanted to apologize for leaving her. But, he could not. If he did he'd be back in Petal Port in no time, and in less comfortable conditions. *Coward* the voice in his head said, *coward*, it repeated. *Coward*, it said for a third time, *coward, traitor, unfaithful lover, commoner trash*, it chanted again and again and again. *Cowar-*, "Enough," Sam said out loud interrupting the voice. He had had enough. He wanted to talk to Micha, to spend five seconds in her arms. He began to stand.

Before he could fully stand a firm hand yanked him downward by the shoulder.

"What are you doing!" Guy exclaimed, his eyes filled with fear.

"It's Micah" Sam replied absently

"The girl who got you into this mess? Leave her be. If you come running to her, all you'll get is a dank cell and a ride back to Petal Port."

The sailor turned his head from the taffrail, a look of understanding and astonishment on his face.

"But, it's Micah" Sam said to Guy, paying the sailor no mind.

"Yes, and if you run to her you're done for. How many times do I have to say that? Let's head back down, I've seen enough for today." As they waited for a chance to return to the hold Sam swore he could smell roses on the sea breeze. They found their way below. It started to rain.

The evening rain was a dirge to his ears as he made his way to the captain's quarters. *Guy shouldn't have said anything, just kept me down*. Thanks to Guy the sailor had realized who Sam was. *And the sailor has most definitely told Mandon*. His worries rose like the sea as the rain augmented the water on the deck. *Will Mandon just throw me overboard and save himself the trouble of my transport?* Sam wondered as he climbed the steps to the captain's cabin. As he opened the door, lightning flashed across the sky. *My life may be like lightning*, Sam thought, *fast and quick*. Thunder boomed as the door closed behind him. In the room, there was a circular table surrounded by three chairs. *Three, that's odd*. The tall (though not so tall now that he was sitting) Mandon Mayflower sat in the chair. A feminine figure sat in the other chair, the back of her head covered with golden hair facing the door. There was something familiar about her. As she turned to face him Sam registered who she was. He rushed over to her. He embraced her as if it was his last day on earth. As if she was all there was. "My flower. My sweet mayflower. I-" Sam's voice broke as tears welled up in his eyes. "It's alright," Micah said hugging him back "I'm here. I'm here."

After his emotions had passed, Sam turned to the captain.

"Why are youse traveling to Petal Port?" Sam asked.

"For the same reason you are," Mandon replied.

Sam knew he was safe now. He could see no reason Mandon would let Micah know of his existence on the ship if he were planning on turning him in. The captain's answer made sure of that.

"Why would you want to run away from Petal Port?" Sam asked

It was Micah who replied this time, “After you went missing I decided it was for the best, I had no wish to marry some other noble lord. I had no room in my heart for anyone but you.” She said.

“Well, what now?”

“You continue normally until the ship docks at Rose Harbor,” Mandon Mayflower said “What happens after that is up to you and Micah”

To describe himself as joyful as he left the captain’s cabin would be an understatement. Sam was ecstatic. *It seems my life won't be like lightning after all, but more like the radiant sun,* Sam thought as he walked out onto the deck.

As he was crossing the deck's center, lighting flashed above. It was blindingly bright and silent too. *And close!* Sam realized. He had taken too long to notice it had hit the mast. In the last few seconds before the mast hit the deck, he stared up at the large cylinder of wood. *I am powerless, he thought, my life is lightning, bright but quick. I am too slow and life is quick. My life was perfect for a time but too quick... too quick.* A sharp white pain coursed through him as the mast came crashing down on him. The pain only lingered for seconds before receding. *Even the radiant sun dies in the end,* Sam thought as death opened its cold arms. As the darkness crowded around him he felt at peace. He felt like the calm sea. Then, he felt nothing.