

TRANSPORTED

I freeze at the top of the gangway, legs shaking, too frightened to take that first step down. My daughter stands beside me, pressing hard against my legs. Harsh and frightened breathing as we take in the strange smells and loud noises of our new land.

Our eyes still adjusting to the dazzling bright after coming out from the dark and the stifling heat. Shivering although the sun beats hot on our backs, we stand paralyzed with fear.

A man growls at me. "Gedda move on then, yer 'olden up the works." I remember coming up this selfsame gangway months ago. I was afraid then, too, and resisted as hard as I could. Strong with panic, until someone produced a horse whip to hurry me upwards. I screamed as it hit the backs of my legs, but the very end of the whip landed on my baby girl's soft bottom, and she shrieked, an inhuman sound of pain and fear as though the Devil himself had jabbed her with his pitchfork.

Anxious, I finally step down onto the wooden dock and sway on my sea legs. Although I am looking far from my best after the arduous sea journey, I sense appreciative glances from both men and women standing in groups beyond the wharf. I am no stranger to being admired, though I am not the perfect physical specimen that my Egyptian mother was, with her glossy black hair and her long elegant neck. I have inherited her shapely legs and curves (shrouded in layers most of the time). Delicate facial features, aristocratic nose and big liquid dark eyes.

Nonetheless, Fate decreed us a life of servitude. The convicts on board are all involuntary arrivals in this colony. My case, though, is special. No judge, no sentence, no hope of emancipation. I have no book learning, no knowledge of this land, no idea of my future. I believe, and hope with quiet desperation, that my new employer (“think of him as Master, whatever he calls himself,” my mother advised) is a kind man. His eyes and voice were gentle when he selected me, even if his hands were disturbingly intimate. He ensured that our conditions were the best available during the voyage, and observing the weals across our bodies, he hunted down the wielder of the whip and had him flogged.

Now, he leads me a little distance to a sapling-fenced area, dotted with trees. “Time to stretch those legs,” he tells me. I move away, stiff-legged at first. My daughter is unsteady on the rough ground. I consider escape. If I ran my very fastest, could I get over those rails and away? Not with the little one. I shake my head regretfully, and increase pace. I snort loudly, tail curling over my back like a war banner. For a few glorious minutes, before the demands of the unknown life ahead, I rejoice in speed and freedom, mane flying, filly foal at full gallop beside me.