

## Deeply - Excerpt

Phillipa wanted nothing more than to shed her clammy clothes and claim the room as her own, except she couldn't risk being discovered before the ship sailed. If she was found as a stowaway while still in port, she knew she would be locked in the city's goal and likely executed. Those of the lower classes knew only the harshest punishments for the smallest crimes. It was the reality of peasant life and one of the reasons that so many were willing to risk the dangerous trip across the sea to embrace a life more free. Even though Phillipa had grown up far from the city, her grandmother had told her all about life in the crowded streets if you were poor. Her nana had been a fountain of knowledge and she never stopped spouting it, as if she wanted Phillipa to know all there was to know about the whole world.

Unsure of her next move, Phillipa froze when she heard approaching voices. A girl was complaining about the smell of the ship, most stridently.

Before Phillipa could dive under the bed, the girl stormed in and slammed the door in a temper. She had long dark hair and clean clothes—not fancy, but decent. She was taller than Phillipa, and around the same age. Her eyes widened when she saw that the cabin was already occupied, yet she did not scream.

“Oh, do I have the wrong berth?” she inquired. “My father said this would be mine and my sister Anne's, as if there is enough space to share this cupboard-sized cubbyhole with anyone, especially her. And for as long as three months if the winds don't cooperate. The trip will be intolerable, I know it will. Well?” The girl put her hands on her hips and faced Phillipa.

Phillipa opened her mouth and said nothing. She was quite speechless.

The girl squinted in the dim light. “Why are you all wet? Did you fall into the ocean?”

“Um, I did.”

“Is this your cabin or mine?”

“It isn't mine,” Phillipa said, “so it must be yours. I'll be on my way.”

They tried to squeeze around each other so Phillipa could leave. Someone banged on the door.

“Yes?” the girl called.

“It's Amos, the cabin boy. I have your chest if you are Susan.”

“I am.”

“Would you be so kind as to open the door, Miss?”

Phillipa shook her head wildly and hissed, “Please don't mention me.”

Susan merely looked confused. “Why ever not?”

“It's heavy!” Amos sang.

Susan's graceful white hand reached for the door latch and Phillipa lunged under the bed, praying the girl would not give her away. A heavy trunk thumped to the floor at the base of the bed, taking up most of the free space.

Proper greetings were exchanged while the boy lit a lantern and hung it, asking, “Is the cabin in order?”

Phillipa had a worm's eye view of the wet floor and hoped no-one else would notice, or maybe a wet floor was normal on a ship. Susan said her cabin was fine for someone the size of a cat. The boy said the ship had rats the size of fully grown cats, as if that

would make her feel better. The girl ushered Amos straight out the door. At least she held her tongue about Phillipa.

As soon as Amos left, there was a charged silence. Phillipa crawled out from under the bed, which she had discovered was securely affixed to the floor. “No cat-sized rats under there,” she said, eyeing Susan nervously.

Susan plunked down on the opposite bunk with her arms crossed. “I think there might have been one rat under there,” she alluded, casting Phillipa a dubious glance. The brightened light had illuminated Phillipa’s disreputable clothing. She hunched her shoulders, trying to conceal some of her raggedy self. She did not dare to sit on the bed and soak the blanket.

“Who are you?” Susan asked.

“I’m Phillipa, I mean Mary,” she corrected hastily. She had to stop using her true name. She had to start *thinking* of herself as Mary.

“Is deception new to you, Phillipa, I mean Mary,” the girl said, but not unkindly.

Phillipa shrugged. “It does appear that way. In truth, it is.”

“Well, you’ll need to lie better than that if you’re going to get away with it. Now, why are you hiding in my cabin?”

“Well ... I’ve landed in a bit of a mess.”

“And what did you do to land yourself in this mess?” Susan said, assuming it was Phillipa’s own doing.

“Not one single thing that I shouldn’t,” Phillipa said, able to speak the truth this time.

“So you say. My name is Susan, Susan Shaw.” The girl introduced herself with her nose slightly in the air, clearly uncertain about Phillipa’s character. “And I’ll call you Mary in company and Phillipa in private, if I decide we will converse again.” She folded her hands primly. “Surely you can’t be travelling alone?”

“I am.”

The door opened without warning and a smaller girl entered. She was less than ten with the same long brown hair as Susan, framing a rounder face.

“Anne, knock before you enter!” Susan ordered bossily.

“This is my cabin, too. I don’t need to knock! Who are you?” Anne looked up at Phillipa.

“Mary. I must go.” Phillipa squeezed around her and fled. It seemed the wisest course of action.

Susan did not call her back.