

CHAPTER FIVE



THE HOUSE ON EGYPT STREET became frantic with activity as the Tulane family prepared for their voyage to England. Edward possessed a small trunk, and Abilene packed it for him, filling it with his finest suits and several of his best hats and three pairs of shoes, all so that he might cut a fine figure in London. Before she placed each outfit in the trunk, she displayed it to him.

“Do you like this shirt with this suit?” she asked him.

Or, “Would you like to wear your black derby? You look very handsome in it. Shall we pack it?”

And then, finally, on a bright Saturday morning in May, Edward and Abilene and Mr. and Mrs. Tulane were all onboard the ship, standing at the railing. Pellegrina was at the dock. On her head, she wore a floppy hat strung around with flowers. She stared straight at Edward. Her dark eyes glowed.

“Goodbye,” Abilene shouted to her grandmother. “I love you.”

The ship pulled away from the dock. Pellegrina waved to Abilene.

“Goodbye, lady,” she called, “goodbye.”

Edward felt something damp in his ears. Abilene’s tears, he supposed. He wished that she would not hold him so tight. To be clutched so fiercely often resulted in wrinkled clothing. Finally, all the people on land, including Pellegrina, dis-appeared. Edward, for one, was relieved to see the last of her.

As was to be expected, Edward Tulane exacted much attention onboard the ship.

“What a singular rabbit,” said an elderly lady with three strings of pearls wrapped around her neck. She bent down to look more closely at Edward.

“Thank you,” said Abilene.

Several little girls onboard gave Edward deep glances full of longing. They asked Abilene if they might hold him.

“No,” said Abilene, “I’m afraid that he’s

not the kind of rabbit who likes to be held by strangers.”

Two young boys, brothers named Martin and Amos, took a particular interest in Edward.

“What does he do?” Martin asked Abilene on their second day at sea. He pointed at Edward who was sitting on a deck chair with his long legs stretched in front of him.

“He doesn’t do anything,” said Abilene.

“Does he wind up somewhere?” asked Amos.

“No,” said Abilene, “he does not wind up.”

“What’s the point of him then?” said Martin.

“The point is that he is Edward,” said Abilene.

“That’s not much of a point,” said Amos.

“It’s not,” agreed Martin. And then, after a long thoughtful pause, he said, “I wouldn’t let anybody dress me like that.”

“Me neither,” said Amos.

“Do his clothes come off?” asked Martin.

“Of course they do,” said Abilene. “He has many different outfits. And he has his own pajamas, too. They are made of silk.”

Edward, as usual, was disregarding the conversation. A breeze was blowing in off the sea, and the silk scarf wrapped around his neck billowed out behind him. On his head, he wore a straw boater. The rabbit was thinking that he must look quite dashing.

It came as a total surprise to him when he was grabbed off the deck chair and first his scarf, and then his jacket and pants, were ripped from his body. He heard his pocket watch hit the deck of the ship; and then, held upside down, he watched the watch roll merrily toward Abilene’s feet.

“Look at him,” said Martin. “He’s even got underwear.” He held Edward aloft so that Amos could see.

“Take it off,” shouted Amos.

“NO!!!!” screamed Abilene.

Martin removed Edward’s underwear.

Edward was paying attention now. He was mortified. He was completely naked except for the hat on his head, and the other passengers onboard the ship were looking at him, directing curious and embarrassed glances his way.

“Give him to me,” screamed Abilene.

“He’s mine.”

“No,” said Amos to Martin, “give him to me.” He clapped his hands together and then held them open. “Toss him,” he said.

“Please,” cried Abilene. “Don’t throw him. He’s made of china. He’ll break.”

Martin threw Edward.

And Edward sailed naked through the air. Only a moment ago, the rabbit had thought that being naked in front of a shipload of strangers was the worst thing that could happen to him. But he was wrong. It was much worse being tossed, in the same naked state, from the hands of one grubby, laughing boy to another.

Amos caught Edward and held him up,

displaying him triumphantly.

“Throw him back,” called Martin.

Amos raised his arm, but just as he was getting ready to throw Edward, Abilene tackled him, shoving her head into his stomach, and upsetting the boy’s aim.

So it was that Edward did not go flying back into the dirty hands of Martin.

Instead, Edward Tulane went overboard.