

With a hiss of steam and a clunk, the metal gangway came to a stop. A familiar man in a dark blue uniform was waiting for her. Two pairs of small horns crowned his head, from which an enormous ponytail flowed. From behind a pair of spectacles, sharp green eyes with a hint of gold glared at her; a rare trait that suggested the man had ancestry from the far West.

“Dockmaster Yu. Always a pleasure to see you well,” Serena said smoothly with a smile. She had come to appreciate Shin Yu, the Dockmaster of Kenhoro.

“You!” He pointed a finger at her. “Get *that ship* out of my docks! Go somewhere else! Why come to Kenhoro, huh!?” Shin waved to the east. “The Tanhae docks are over there! Yes, hello!? I can hear them now! They want you to go over there! Shoo! Bye-bye!” He motioned with his hands frantically, as if hoping he could buzz her away like an annoying fly.

Shin Yu spoke Imperial with a thick accent, and much of his native Manwese tone slipped through. He was unbelievably direct when speaking Imperial, lacking the full vocabulary to be more tactful. Not that anyone would criticise him for it. No captain would dare get on the bad side of the dockmaster.

“Come now, we’ll be out of your horns before you know it. A bit of work on the hull, and we’ll vanish like the wind.” Serena flashed her most charismatic smile.

“That ship! Bad luck!” He was wagging his finger at her now. Shin Yu enjoyed expressing himself with his hands. “You! Bad luck!” Serena pondered how she could placate the excitable dockmaster when a pair of figures approached from the side.

“Just the man I need!” declared Allston, her chief engineer. He was flanked by his niece. “We need two overhead cranes, thirty metres of two-by-one girder, eighty metres of half-by-half. Good man, how many armour plates do you have lying about?” Allston put an arm around the dockmaster and practically dragged him

away, ignorant of the noises of protest coming out of the man. His niece rolled her eyes and gave Serena a knowing look before following after them.

Well, that was one problem dealt with. Those two would talk over each other for hours. She turned and shouted back up the gangway, “Dagon! Start letting the crew off!” After she heard the affirmative reply, she made her way to the requisition office, where she found a demon lazing around behind a windowed desk reading the broadsheets.

The man did a double-take, eyes widening in recognition and surprise. “Speaker Halen! It’s an honour!” He scrambled to his feet and gave her a hasty salute.

“Turn that around, Officer. Let me have a look,” she said, nodding her head at the broadsheets. The requisitions officer obeyed, and Serena read the large block capitals printed across the broadsheet: *EASTERN FLEET ADVANCES*. The subheading underneath read: *ADMIRAL ZHAO EXPLOITS COLLAPSE AFTER KEY LOGISTICS CENTRE LIBERATED*.

“When was this printed?” she asked.

“This morning, Speaker Halen!” the officer enthusiastically responded. “They say that it was your doing! They’re saying you might be awarded an Eagle!”

Serena narrowed her eyes. “Who’s saying that?”

“It’s all in there, Speaker Halen.” The demon gestured to the broadsheet she was reading. Serena skimmed the contents. She was named, as was the *Vengeance*. There wasn’t a picture of the *Vengeance;* the broadsheets were forbidden from publishing a photograph of the ship. Yet a lack of visuals didn’t stop them from building up the ship as an unstoppable vessel undetectable by the enemy.

Reading further, she found the officer was right and the papers reported that sources within the Eastern Admiralty suggested she’d been recommended for the medal. She wondered if her father had anything to do with that. He could have leveraged the strategic position the war had put their family in for such a cause. Alternatively, if they were planning to honourably discharge her from the Navy, then the medal would be the method to buy her silence.

“How did the broadsheets find out about this so fast?” she asked.

“Admiral Zhao took a media team with him. They docked up in the civilian bays last night.”

That would explain it. If the media arrived at Port Highwind shortly after the fleet did, they would have beaten them back to Kenhoro, especially as her own departure was delayed due to the fighting and the Dragon’s politicking.

“Right,” Serena said, turning her gaze from the broadsheet to the officer. “You got any raincoats? One my size and one”–she held her palm up flat, level with her eyebrows–“about this size. Get me a few pairs of boots, size seven through to ten, and the socks for them. Find a couple of rainhats as well.”

The requisitions officer scrawled down her request and disappeared into the back. Amelia wasn’t technically wearing a military uniform as they had ripped any identifying parts off, but it was still Republican colours, and she didn’t want to take her out into the city until she was wearing something that wouldn’t draw attention. While mentally mapping out the path they would take in the city, a voice called out to her.

“Serena! Is that you?”

Serena turned towards the goatee-sporting demon with a handsome face. He wore a uniform that was similar to hers, but instead of gold trim, red thread decorated the edges.

“Aiden!” she exclaimed in surprise, recognising the man. She corrected herself after noticing the marks on his shoulder. “Officer Adachi? Congratulations… looks like you found your place in Intelligence.” Aiden Adachi stroked his goatee and gave her a grin.

“Took three attempts but got there in the end! When was the last time we met? At graduation?”

“We saw each other two years later at the shareholder meeting in Asamoto. You were”–Serena couldn’t help but form a smile–“too far gone to recognise me. You thought I was my sister and tried flirting with me, you bastard.” Aiden’s drinking prowess at the academy was somewhat legendary, and it hadn’t seemed to have died down when they had encountered each other four years ago.

Although if he'd found a career in Intelligence, he must have gotten it under control.

The demon rubbed the back of his neck, sporting a nervous grin. "My bad, my bad. You know Nina's name is cropping up more and more in reports? She's got a team working for her now. Whatever she's building, they're throwing gold at it."

Serena nodded at his words. She didn't know much about what her sister was working on currently, but whatever that genius was cooking up would no doubt be a significant help to the war effort and the family's reputation. Hopefully, if the Empress smiles on her, her acquisition of Amelia would also boost House Halen's prestige.

Hang on, was it really just down to chance that she bumped into Aiden?

"We're all very proud of her," she replied, keeping her voice neutral. She eyed him with a cold stare until he started to wither. "Why are you here, Officer Adachi?" she asked.

"They got me doing grunt work, stock takes and the like," Aiden said, shrugging while looking to the side. "You'd be surprised at just how bad the–"

"Cut the shit, you're here for the human right?"

"Damn right, I am!" her old friend blurted out shamelessly. "Can I meet her!?"

"...For what purpose?"

"The big horns want me to do a personality profile on her. That's it, honest!" Aiden's eyes took on a pleading look. "Come on, Serena! This is my big opportunity! I've been doing logistics for years now! I'm about ready to pull my horns off!"

Serena folded her arms. "What happens if I say no?"

"Then…" Aiden sighed. "I guess there's an escalation. You know how far they can go. They want to do things quietly and peacefully out of respect for you and your family. It really is just a profile, please?"

"Give me a week."

“A week?”

“Miss Thornheart is somewhat ignorant of things. I’m teaching her a bit of common sense before letting her… roam. Etiquette as well. We’ll be meeting my father in Shimashina after the repairs are done.”

“How long are you here for?”

“A month, maybe. No longer than six weeks. Ship's got a big hole that needs filling.”

“Where are you staying?”

“...At The Highguard, if they have rooms.”

“Ah, family friend, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Well then… In about a week, the moonrain festival will start.” A glint appeared in Aiden’s eyes, and his mouth formed into a knowing grin. “We could all go out then? Show her a good time?”

“You mean, go out drinking?” Serena sighed. Maybe he hadn’t changed. He was still an idiot, although a different type of idiot than Amelia was.

“They have a street here, half a klick long, you know?” Aiden motioned with his hands. “I don’t know its Manwese name, but the Imperial translation is *Beer Street*. Know why? Pubs!” Aiden cast his hands dramatically. “Everywhere! We could do a pub crawl and introduce the human to a proper demon drink! Like we did on those academy weekends.”

“That is a terrible idea.” She shook her head. “We’re not students anymore, Officer Adachi.”

“But!” Aiden exclaimed, raising a finger. “We are demons. And I’m still on my crusade to find a human that can outdrink Aiden The Drinker!”

“It was Aiden The Drunk, idiot,” she retorted, smiling at the academy memories popping into her mind. Maybe it wasn’t a completely terrible idea. As a Speaker, it

wasn't like she or Amelia could get drunk easily, and the woman was *twenty-five*. Serena didn't want or plan to treat her like a child. Besides, it *could* be fun. Perhaps Amelia would like to dance, perhaps–

Ah, what in the Seven Hells was she imagining? Serena mentally slapped herself. What dangerous fantasies were creeping into her mind? She tried to push them away but found she was unable to. The image of her and Amelia dancing together…

It was nice.

Damn it. Serena clicked her tongue. Who said she couldn't have a *friend*? Who said she had to play the stiff captain *all the time*? She was allowed to have fun, right?

"Alright," she said. "Next week. For the festival."

"Wonderful! Thank you, Serena! You've saved my hide!" He gave her a friendly salute. Serena had an increasing suspicion that Amelia and he were going to get on. "Oh, one more thing. Some of the prisoners of war from the Port Highwind liberation were intercepted by the enemy. So keep an eye out, alright? We've put a team on both of you. They may try to approach the human while we're here."

"Republican Intelligence is in Kenhoro?"

"Probably not. They don't have the resources. It'll be Federation boys, which means if something happens, at least try to be a little *diplomatic*."

"...Sure," Serena said, thinking about the most diplomatic way to stab someone.

"You've got that look in your eye again."

"What look!?"

"...Nothing."

"Speaker Halen! Here we are!" The requisitions officer reappeared carrying a sack. "Two raincoats, four pairs of boots from size seven through to ten. Four pairs of socks and a pair of rainhats. Sign this, please." He pushed forward a

piece of paper and a pen. Serena signed the document, and the sack of clothes was handed to her.

“What will you do now?” she asked Aiden.

“Well, I should probably follow you, all secret-like”–he shrugged–“but I think I’ll get a drink and start planning the pub crawl…”

“You’re… incorrigible.”

“What does that mean?”

“Just one of the many ways you’re an idiot.”

“Can’t be that much of an idiot! I’m an Intelligence Officer! Although…” A momentary pause. “Actually, most of them are idiots. Damn it…”

“Go have your drink, Officer Adachi. I’ll see you in a week.”

“Alright! See you then, don’t do anything stupid while I’m not there!”

“Stupid… like what?”

“Like employ a human Speaker, stupid!” He laughed, and Serena joined in a little. She had enjoyed her time at the academy; demons like Aiden were the closest she had to friends.

She waved him off and headed back to the *Vengeance*. On deck, she found Allston lost in thought.

“Allston?”

“Ah, Captain. They have most of the things we need, but the armour plates won’t be here until the Ponan shipment arrives. So we should be good to go in a month. Thorne's in the armoury, seeing what turrets they have in stock, if any.” That was a relief. The plating was the last work to be done, so they could busy themselves with repairing the steel skeleton until the Ponan convoy arrived.

“Good work, Allston,” she said, patting the man on the shoulder. “Try to give your boys some breaks, alright? Have a chat with Tomes and see what extra payment we can arrange.”

“Aye, Captain.”

The chief engineer drifted off into his own thoughts again. Serena left him there and headed back into the ship.

It was time to take Amelia out into the city.



Amelia thought that if Serena had taken one minute longer, she would have escaped the ship no matter what. She didn’t want to spend another second here! After Tomes had described more of Kenhoro and its towering pagodas, she was itching to see it in person!

“Finally!” Amelia cried out when the door opened, and the familiar set of magnificent horns appeared. “I was going to die from boredom!” Serena stepped through, carrying a mysterious sack.

“Wouldn’t want that, would we?” Serena said, before turning her gaze to Tomes. “How’s it going?”

“Payments, payments and… more payments. These books will take a while.” Tomes peered up through his neat spectacles, raising a finger to point at a small pouch on the table. “Some spending money for you both, a hundred denarii. Take it you two won’t be staying in the barracks?”

“No,” Serena said, shaking her head and pocketing the small but heavy purse. “I’ll see if Highguard has any rooms. What about you and your brother?”

“We’ll find somewhere. Probably on the outskirts. Hotels are going to be busy near the centre with the upcoming festival.”

A festival!

“There’s a festival!? What kind!?” Amelia blurted out before she could stop herself.

“It’s the moonrain festival,” Serena explained. “A celebration of the moon cycle that provides our world with crystals. There’ll be fireworks, music, costumes, and… drinking.”

“Can I… can we go?” Amelia asked, trying to inject as much pleading as possible into her voice. She had never been to any kind of festival before, only witnessing them through monitors from her hospital bed or through the gaming headset.

“Sure,” came the reply, and Amelia threw her hands up in celebration. She was going to a festival! “Thank you!”

“As long as,” Serena said, raising a finger, “you are good and absorb all the lessons about civilian life Tomes and I are going to be giving you. You need a basic understanding of the laws and what rights you have as a *human* in *demon* territory,” she paused for a moment, before continuing, “It’s a little more complicated with you, as you’re employed by House Halen so you have additional privileges that you should know about.”

Now that was interesting! She was going to ask Serena about these privileges, but Tomes spoke first.

“There are further complications, Captain,” Tomes began. “I’m not sure if Cascadian Speaker privileges apply to her. She’s not technically a citizen of the Empire. I’m not even sure what she would fall under. A refugee? Doesn’t really fit. And…” He took off his spectacles and began cleaning them. “If the Federation or the human Church makes a public claim for her, it could cause an awful set of problems.”

“Hmmph!” Amelia said, crossing her arms and sticking her head to the side. “I don’t care who or what tries to claim me! I belong to Lady Halen!” She snuck a glance at Serena and was pleased to find a tinge of redness on her cheeks.

Serena was secretly a big softie, wasn’t she?

“Shut up, idiot, and put these on.” Serena dug around in the sack she was holding and threw her an overcoat and several pairs of boots and socks. “It’s a raincoat to put over your uniform. Don’t want you walking around in Republican colours. The first thing we’ll do is head to a tailor and find you… Something else.” Serena gestured to the boots. “See what pair fits you the best. Change your socks also.”

Thank the heavens! The pair she was wearing felt awfully tight, and while her tough skin could never blister, it was still a persistent source of irritation. She untied the laces and removed the old pair. The size seven was too small for her to slip her feet into. The eight she could just manage, but the nine fit perfectly. She walked around a bit to get a feel for them, and once she was satisfied, she wormed her way into the raincoat. The thin brown leather easily covered her uniform underneath.

“All ready!” She flashed Serena a thumbs-up.

“Good. Take this, put it on. Tie your hair up so it can’t be seen.” Serena handed her a cone-shaped straw hat. Amelia did as she was told and tied her hair up into a bun before placing the hat on her head and fiddling with the thin chin strap to make it comfortable.

“It rains a lot in the east, so you’ll always want to go out with a raincoat and a rainhat. Let’s go. Tomes, I’ll come find you in a day or two, see how our finances are looking.” Serena donned her own raincoat, and before Amelia could ask how she was going to wear the accessory, Serena simply pulled it down on her head, allowing her horns to pierce through the straw. Amelia couldn’t help but let out a giggle.

“What?” Serena said, looking puzzled.

“I thought there would be special hats that account for your horns?”

“Oh.” Serena tapped the hat. “The individual variation in horns is great enough that they need to be custom-made. I’ll go to a milliner later in the week and have some made.”

“What’s a milliner?”

“A hat-maker.”

“Oh, okay!”

“Ready?”

“Yup!” Amelia nodded enthusiastically. Her hat bounced about, so she adjusted the chin strap so it was tighter. She followed Serena through the first deck and outside.

“Whoa!” she exclaimed in wonder, blown away by the view. The Imperial docks were massive. She didn’t think she had ever seen so much steel in one place. They stretched in each direction for maybe half a kilometre, a dozen empty bays to the left and another half dozen to the right. There were a few smaller ships docked up, but nothing the size of the *Vengeance*.

Each bay had enormous steel towers and other structures around them, some looked like cranes, some looked like the arms used to hold ships in place and the others she had no idea about. Looking up she saw the docks had a second tier, with another dozen and a half bays and beyond that there was a third tier. The scale was hard to wrap her mind around.

There were huge warehouses lining the wall between the tier she was on and the one above. From these, train tracks spewed out, going off into other areas and the bays themselves. It appeared that moving a ship from the bay into a warehouse was possible if needed.

High above, massive brass lettering, perhaps ten metres high, spelt out a phrase in High Imperial. There was another phrase under it in letters half the size. There was a single word she could read here, thanks to her work with Imperial numbers that morning; the number seven hundred and eighty-six.

“What does that say?” she asked, almost whispering. Serena followed her finger to the giant letters.

“It says, *Kenhoro Imperial Airdocks*. The bit underneath says *Opened In The Year Of Divinity Seven Eighty-Six By The Imperial Majesty Of Cascadia*.”

“Imperial Majesty being…?”

“Empress Elana, yes.”

“Wow, it’s… so big. There’s so much *metal* everywhere. It all feels so… practical.”

“That’s Imperial military architecture for you. Kenhoro proper feels completely different. It’s mostly wood and clay. It’s an amazing city. Come on.”

“Okay…” Amelia followed Serena quietly. She kept lifting her head up just to take in the sheer scale of the space, which made her feel tiny. Serena led her through a small opening, and soon, they were lost in a small maze of corridors.

“We’re taking a side exit,” Serena explained. “There will likely be people looking for you at the main gate.” Serena stopped and then looked directly at Amelia. “Never Speak in the city unless your life is in danger. It is against Imperial law to do so in urban areas. There is much greater tolerance for using first-, second-, and third-circle spells or techniques to defend yourself, but you should still only use these if needed. Understand?”

Amelia nodded furiously.

Once she and Serena were closer, she would tell her that she could Speak covertly. She wondered if there were exceptions in the law for that ability.

“Second, if you ever get lost or something goes wrong, come back here to the ship. Use the symbol of my house that Tomes gave you to get through the gate. If that doesn’t work, force your way through and get on the ship. You’ll see once we get out, but the Imperial docks have a series of huge lighthouses above them; they can be seen throughout most of the city.”

“I understand!”

“Good, let’s go.” They continued for a minute and then came to a steel gate manned by a pair of guards. Serena spoke to them quietly for a moment. Amelia heard her introduce herself, prompting them to quickly salute her. A few words later, and they opened the gates, allowing them to step through into Kenhoro proper.

For the second time, Amelia couldn’t stop exclaiming in wonder. The streets were paved and lined with lamp posts and trees. Hundreds of people formed small groups going this way and that. There was a light rain, and everyone was wearing some form of raincoat and rainhat. The people moved like brown blobs, although

some were brightly coloured, especially the children, whose little horns poked through their straw hats. They were so adorable!

There were some humans mixed in as well. One in ten, perhaps. On average, they were shorter than the demons, and their intact straw hats stood out amongst a sea of horns.

The street was lined with three-story buildings, the bottom floor being a shop of some kind. Amelia couldn't read the shop names, but she could see a cobbler, a flower shop and a café or two. Some of the signs were written in a different script she had never seen before. She pointed it out to Serena.

"That's Manwese, the native language of this region – Kenhoro, Tanhae, Ponan, and some of Shimashina. High Imperial is only truly dominant in Centralis, and its culture and language have naturally exported itself to the Terra-Firmas over the centuries. Everyone speaks Imperial, though, so you needn't worry."

"The buildings look gorgeous!" Amelia exclaimed, and they did. Each floor was separated by a curved tiled roof that jutted out from the whitewashed walls, supported by thick beams of dark wood. The ends of these beams ended in carvings of strange animals.

"It's called a gabled roof. All the roofs in the region are curved like this. It's effective at keeping the rain off. Look at that one. Can you see how it has a triangular piece on top?" Serena gestured to a building down the street, and Amelia saw a pagoda standing five stories tall, topped with a fancy-looking triangle-tiled structure decorated with small statues. "That's a hip-and-gable roof. Important buildings like shrines or government buildings have them."

"And is this some kind of shrine?" Amelia could see some people bowing towards the structure as they passed. Something seemed to be giving off smoke. Were they burning incense?

"Yes, it's a religious structure, built as a home for the Kami."

"Kami?"

"Spirits of the elements. Quinto is the dominant religion here, and it worships the Kami."

This was confusing. Wasn't the Empress supposed to be a literal thousand-year-old god? Why would they worship something else? Was that even allowed? Amelia raised her questions with Serena, who explained that the Quinists believed that the Empress was a great Kami taking demon form.

"There are many religions in the four corners of Cascadia, and you'll find out that they all – in some way or another – worship the Empress," Serena said.

Amelia nodded. That made sense. If the Empress was a thousand years old, then the religions would have adapted and formed around her as a central figure.

"I see…"

"Come now." Serena led her through the crowd and down the streets, eventually stopping and stepping into a tailor's shop. "Here," Serena said, indicating towards some coat hooks at the entranceway. "Every shop or eatery has these to put your raincoats and hats on." Serena removed her outer layer, and Amelia followed.

"You are Clothmaster Dai?" Serena asked the short demon tailor who was waiting patiently. "You fixed my father's suits a few summers ago, is that correct?"

"That's right, Lady Halen, I presume?" The female tailor gave a small bow. "It's an honour to have the famous Speaker and captain in my shop. How may I–oh my!" The tailor's eyes went wide as she bounced up to Amelia, and before she could protest, Amelia found herself being turned this way and that. "What a dreadfully fitting uniform! Surely this wasn't provided by House Halen!?"

"No," Serena said, an amused look in her eye as the eager demon manhandled Amelia. "She is an employee of the house, only recently signing a contract. This old Republican uniform is the only thing that fits her. I'm looking to have a few outfits made."

"Of course, of course." A tape measure appeared from somewhere and suddenly Amelia was directed to stick her arms and legs out in different directions while the tailor eagerly took measurements. "What kind of work will she be assigned?"

"...I'm not sure. We need something practical and easy to move in. Three sets should do, I think. Also, another three sets of casual wear. We also want a formal

suit and several sets of bedwear. Oh…" Serena paused for a moment, looking away from Amelia. "And a pair of dresses, red."

"Dresses?" Amelia asked, raising an eye at Serena.

"Yes… for the festival."

"Are you going to be wearing a dress?"

"...Of course."

How exhilarating! Amelia had never seen Serena in anything other than her uniform or the medical-wing garments. Hell, Serena even slept in her uniform most of the time! It was criminal to hide all those curves behind a stiff military outfit! Now she was even more excited for the upcoming festival.

"Lady Halen, we're all done. Any preference for colour for the work uniforms?"

"Dark grey or black, with silver trim. As for the casual clothes, keep the colours dull, something that can easily blend in."

"Of course," said the tailor. "For now, you must let me put her in something that isn't so outrageous! Those Republicans really have no sense of style. Hmm… here we go!" A set of clothes was fished out from a stack of uniforms and handed to her. "These should be far more comfortable. Head through there, my dear. Shout if you have any trouble." The demon gestured to a curtained area.

"O-okay! Thank you, Miss Tailor!" She gave a small bow and hurried into the side room. Pulling the curtain along the rail, Amelia undressed and began slipping into the new clothes. They were light brown and grey, but the clothes were clearly very high quality and more comfortable than her previous uniform. It took her a while to work out how to tighten certain parts. There were tassels that seemed to be elastic that could be pulled and fixed into place.

Eventually, she was happy with how it felt and returned to the shop floor.

"Much better," Serena said approvingly.

“Oh my dear, you’ve tightened it all wrong!” The tailor ducked all around her, adjusting parts here and there, and the clothes that had already felt comfortable now felt like a second skin. “Try moving,” the tailor said.

Amelia moved her arms and walked around the room. “This feels amazing,” she said. “I never knew clothes could feel this comfortable! You’re amazing!” Amelia gave a genuine compliment.

“Oh, thank you, dear,” the tailor said with a smile on her face. “It’s not just me! That’s wool from the sheep fields of Fengra! Very expensive, but very comfortable.”

“How long will the clothes take to tailor?” Serena asked.

“Hmm… six days for the work and casual uniforms, another three for the suit and another three for the two dresses. Let’s call it a fortnight.”

“Price?”

“Two hundred and twenty denarii. I’ll have to buy the dye for the dresses, but I won’t charge for that! Just let me see her wear it!” The tailor beamed at her, prompting Amelia to swallow nervously. What was she, some kind of dress-up doll?

And what was that price!? If she remembered right, these clothes were equal to about *two years* of a normal soldier's salary! Was this the price of someone with the title of *Clothmaster?*

“Right, we’ll need at least one set of uniforms as soon as possible. After that, prioritise the dresses in time for the festival. Where's your credit book?” Serena asked, and the tailor provided her with a small book that Serena wrote in. She then ripped a page out of the book and handed it to the tailor.

“Thank you for your custom, Lady Halen,” said the tailor, giving another small bow. “And thank you, miss”–she bent her head in Amelia’s direction–“for allowing me to make you such fine clothes!”

“Uh, no problem! I can’t wait to see them!”

“Come on, you.” Serena pulled her to the shop exit, where they donned their raincoats and hats. “Let’s go,” she said, stepping outside the shop.

“Where are we going now?” Amelia asked. There was a moment of silence, and then the answer came, softly spoken.

“To get a hotel room…”

How scandalous that sentence was! As she was led once again through the crowd, Amelia let her mind come up with all kinds of inappropriate scenarios.

The best part was that Serena had said *room*, singular!

What a flirtatious captain she was becoming…