

AGAINST THE TIDE



A NOVEL

ELIZABETH CAMDEN



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For my husband, Bill . . . the inspiration
behind every hero I've ever written.

PROLOGUE

BOSTON, 1876

Lydia was embarrassed to wear a damp dress on the first day of school, but it rained last night while her clothes were strung across the boat's rigging to dry. She was lucky to be going to school at all, and tried not to think about her clammy dress as she walked to the schoolhouse, her hand clasped in her father's work-roughened palm. He seemed more nervous than she was as they walked to the school, almost a mile from the pier where their boat was docked. The school was a fancy brick building with real glass in the windows. There were no windows on the boat where Lydia lived, just oiled parchment that let a little light into the cabin where the whole family slept.

Papa did not want her to go to school at all. Last night he and Mama had a big fight about it, and Lydia had heard every word. They made her and Baby Michael go beneath the hatch, but living on a boat as tiny as the *Ugly Kate* meant she could hear everything.

"That girl doesn't speak a word of English!" her father roared.

“What is the point of sending her to school if she can’t understand what they are saying?”

“She will learn,” Mama said. “Look how quickly she learned to speak Italian when she was just a small child. She already knows Greek and Turkish and even Croatian from the year we lived there. She is good with languages, and she will learn English. Lydia is nine years old, and it is time for her to be in school.” They never stayed in one place long enough for her to go to school in the past, but that was supposed to change now that they were in America.

Lydia had been a baby when they left their tiny Greek island. Papa said they had to leave because people did not like that he married a Turkish woman. They sailed away in a fishing boat Papa had built with his own hands, hugging the coastline of the rocky Adriatic shores until they got to the islands of Italy. That didn’t last very long either. From there they spent time on the coasts of Albania and Croatia.

They lived on Papa’s boat, casting nets into the crystalline sea and hauling aboard prawns, bluefish, and bass. Lydia’s earliest memories were of sunbaked days sorting the fish into baskets on the deck of their boat. In the evenings they pushed the nets and tackle to the side and laid their bedding beneath the stars. Lydia’s entire life was on that boat, from cooking meals over the gas burner, sitting on Mama’s lap to learn her letters, and twice a week washing her hair in the salty water of the Mediterranean Sea. Mama said it was the salt and sun that put coppery glints into Lydia’s dark hair. “Just like a brand-new penny,” Mama would say as she combed Lydia’s hair to dry in the sun. Her brother, Michael, was born in Sicily. He was four years old now, and she was supposed to stop calling him “Baby Michael,” but it was still how she thought of him.

Lydia wasn’t sure why they had to leave Sicily, but over the summer they got on a huge ship and sailed all the way across the

Atlantic Ocean until they reached Boston. Papa said things would be better here, but Lydia was not so sure. Their fishing boat wasn't nearly as nice as the one Papa had built in Greece. He tried to fix the *Ugly Kate*, but water kept seeping through the hull, and it was Lydia's job to fill cans and throw the water overboard. Five times a day she emptied the bilge, but there was always at least an inch of water on the floor of the cabin where they slept. Papa said the sloshing water meant their cabin was always clean, so they should be grateful they had such a special, self-cleaning boat. It was all part of his plan, he had laughed.

Lydia didn't care if they lived on a lousy boat. For the past three years, the only thing she had asked for every Christmas was to go to school. She had seen glimpses of other children walking to school in the village in Sicily and daydreamed about all the wonderful things they must be learning behind those closed doors.

Papa still did not want to let her go to school. He had pointed to Lydia's thin cotton smock that was six inches too short. "You want to send our princess to school looking like that?" he roared at Mama, gesturing to Lydia's ankles showing beneath the bottom of her dress. Two weeks ago her hem caught fire when she brushed too close to the cooking burner, and Mama had to cut it off. The scorch marks no longer showed, but Papa was still upset about her only dress.

"I won't have it," he said with resolution. "I won't have my princess being ridiculed by the hoodlums of Boston." His face crumpled up, and Lydia thought he might be about to cry.

She scampered across the deck and threw her arms around his waist. "Don't be sad, Papa. I'll learn English right away, and then I'll be able to teach you and Mama and Baby Michael too. We'll all be able to speak it."

Papa, whose calloused fingers stroked the hair from her forehead,

cradled her as he rocked her from side to side. “My poor little water sprite, you don’t know how cruel children can be.”

“I don’t care if they make fun of me,” she said. “And Mama can wash my dress so it won’t smell, and I’ll look just as nice as any of the other children.”

“We will wash your dress tonight so it will be fresh and pretty for school tomorrow,” Mama said. “Lydia *must* go to school. It is time.” Lydia smiled when she recognized that tone. Papa usually got his way, but when Mama’s voice grew firm like that, he always obeyed.

It rained overnight. When fat raindrops began spattering on the top of the cabin, she raced aboveboard to yank the dress off the rigging. She fell flat on her face when she tripped over the crab traps that slid to the middle of the deck, and by the time she pulled the dress from the rigging it was soaked. It was still damp as she walked to the schoolhouse the next morning.

Lydia sat in the hall while her father talked to a lady in an office near the front of the school. Rather, he was speaking words in Greek and gesturing with his hands, which the woman did not understand. When Papa turned around and pointed to Lydia sitting on a bench in the hallway, comprehension dawned on the woman’s face. Lydia slid off the bench as the frazzled lady came to stand in front of her. The lady spoke very quickly to Lydia, then waited as if she expected Lydia to say something. The lady seemed very stern as she scrutinized Lydia’s dress, especially when she reached out to feel the still-wet cloth. Now the lady was muttering beneath her breath and glaring at Papa, even though it had been Lydia’s idea to wash the dress.

Lydia stared at the lady’s mouth as she said the same phrases over and over and then waited, as if she expected Lydia to respond. Lydia knew only one word in English, and perhaps this was the right time to say it.

She looked straight into the lady's eyes, smiled, and said, "Okay."

That seemed to satisfy the lady, who turned and gestured to Lydia to follow. Lydia knew she had been accepted into the school and felt like the sun was bursting inside her. She whirled around to wave goodbye to Papa, who twisted his cap between his hands, anxiety written all over his face as he waved goodbye to her.

Lydia darted to follow the lady down the hall. She was going to school! The hallways were wide and straight, and the floors were polished to a high shine. The air smelled so fresh it made her feel good just to breathe it.

It was obvious she was late for class, because the other students were already in their desks and a man at the front of the room was writing on one of those fancy black pieces of slate. The door creaked open and all eyes in the room swiveled to stare at her. The angry lady talked to the teacher while Lydia turned to look at the students lined up in their neat, orderly rows.

They looked so *clean*. All of them had their hair combed and wore socks under their shoes. Did they always look so tidy, or only today because it was the first day of school? The teacher pulled Lydia's hand to lead her to a desk at the back of the room. Her very own desk. It had a matching seat and she wouldn't even have to share it with anybody! The man started speaking to her, but she didn't understand. His face was kind as he knelt down beside her desk and repeated himself more slowly this time. It didn't make any difference. She didn't have any idea what he was saying, but she knew he was friendly and was waiting for some kind of answer from her.

She smiled broadly. "Okay," she said, and once again it seemed to be the answer he wanted to hear.

The teacher returned to the front of the room, and the class began.



Lydia ran as fast as her skinny legs could carry her. She hurtled through the air as she rushed to the pier to meet Papa after school. It didn't take long to spot him pacing along the pier, his face still drawn and worried. Lydia could tell the moment he saw her because he whipped the cap from his head and came striding across the pier in those giant steps of his. She thought her lungs would burst as she raced even faster to fling herself into his arms. "Oh, Papa, it was *perfect!*"

The word seemed so puny to describe the joy that bloomed inside her. She should tell him how wonderful the school was, how kind the teacher had been to her. There was so much more she wanted to say, but her throat clogged up when she tried to speak. Why was she crying when she was happy? But a fat tear rolled down each side of her face, and it was impossible to talk through the lump in her throat.

"The teacher's name was Mr. Bennett," Lydia told her parents once they were back on their boat. "I saw the letters of his name written on the blackboard, and at lunch he sat with me and repeated it over and over until I understood. He was very nice, and he even gave me part of his sandwich for lunch."

Mama had not realized that children were supposed to bring something to eat for lunch, and she said that tomorrow Lydia should bring Mr. Bennett a nice piece of fresh cod to thank him for being so nice.

"And what about the children? They were nice to you?" Papa asked, guarded worry in his eyes.

Lydia wasn't stupid; she had seen some of the girls laughing at her short dress and whispering behind their hands. Not that she cared. Why should such a little thing bother her when she had a sturdy desk all to herself and when there were so many fascinating things in the classroom to look at? Maps on the walls showed the

outline of all the countries in the whole world, and in one corner there was a stuffed eagle with its wings stretched outright. But her father was worried, and he was waiting for her answer.

“No one said a single bad thing to me,” she said truthfully.

And it didn't really matter that she didn't speak English, because the next day Lydia learned that two of the children in the class spoke Italian, and there was another little girl who spoke only Russian. She made friends with them and sat beside them at lunch every day, easily picking up a number of Russian words to add to her repertoire of languages.

And as the weeks rolled by, Lydia learned more and more words in English. Mr. Bennett seemed particularly pleased with how quickly she was learning. “Clever girl,” he said as he patted her on the top of her head. Lydia wasn't certain what “clever” meant, but she knew it was good and she loved it when Mr. Bennett called her a clever girl, which he did a lot.

But on this particular chilly day in October, Lydia did not feel so clever as she stood at the pier to wait for Papa. Normally, Papa and the *Ugly Kate* were already waiting for her after school. It was a windy day, so getting sail power back to the harbor should not have been a problem. Lydia sat on a bench, swinging her legs and kicking at a discarded pile of rope to pass the time until the *Ugly Kate* got there.

By the time the sun started to set, hunger gnawed at her tummy and it was starting to get cold. Papa would not forget to come get her after school, so that meant something bad must have happened to the *Ugly Kate*.

She didn't know what to do. As the sun sank lower, boat after boat pulled up to the dock. The sailors unloaded their tackle, secured the rigging, then slung their haul over their shoulders and left the pier for their homes. By now Lydia was shaking so

badly she didn't really know whether it was from the cold or from the fear. Maybe she would have to spend the entire night here on the dock.

It wouldn't be the first time she slept outside. When they first came to Boston they spent two weeks living in a public park while Papa looked for a boat to buy. He told them it was a grand adventure. "Think how lucky we are not to live in a smelly old tenement when we can sleep under a cathedral of the stars," he had said. At the time, Lydia would have preferred the smelly old tenement, but her father assured her that sleeping under the stars was all part of his plan. "Breathe in that clean American air!" he had said. "Sleeping outside is the only way to experience it, and we would not want to miss out on it!"

Lydia tried to savor the clean American air as she sat huddled on the dockside bench, but it was too cold to draw a deep breath. There was a big difference between sleeping outside in August and sleeping outside in October. She found a piece of discarded sailcloth near the end of the wharf and wrapped it around her shoulders.

It was stupid to be worrying about Papa. He was the best sailor in the world. He had built the boat they lived on in Sicily with his own two hands, and he had fixed up the *Ugly Kate* to make her sail again, even though Mama called it a "floating heap."

Once or twice she started to doze, but she always jerked awake as soon as she relaxed the grip on the sailcloth and the cold air pierced her thin dress. As the weak light of dawn illuminated the bay, Lydia scanned the dozens of boats lashed to the docks, praying the *Ugly Kate* had sailed into port overnight and she had missed it. Her father would laugh and tell her how foolish she had been for thinking, even for an instant, he would not come for her.

She stood on the bench and scanned the pier, filled with dozens of boats coming in and out of the harbor. As far as her eye could see, none of the boats resembled the *Ugly Kate*.



Lydia fought to understand the words that were being spoken around her, but all the grown-ups were speaking so quickly and no one took the time to help her understand. Mr. Bennett, her teacher, was there, and so were two men wearing police uniforms. Another man had a funny shirt with a white notch cut into the collar, and Lydia thought he must be some kind of minister.

Certain words she heard over and over. *Orphanage* was one of them. *Deportation* and *Greece* were the other words they kept saying. She had no idea what *orphanage* meant, but she thought it must be a good thing, because Mr. Bennett seemed to be in favor of the orphanage. He got red in the face and shook his head when the others spoke of “deportation.”

It had been five days since that awful night she spent outside, and her family had not returned for her. She knew Papa would never abandon her, and that meant the *Ugly Kate* had probably sunk at sea. Which meant Papa and Mama and Baby Michael were all dead, and Lydia refused to believe that. They must have lost their way, and they would come back soon.

She had been staying at a place called a convent, where a lot of women wore all black, but there were no children and the ladies in black did not know what to do with her. Yesterday they brought a Greek fisherman to the convent to translate for her. He had massive gray eyebrows and the skin on his face was like leather, and he asked all kinds of questions about her family back in Greece.

“I don’t have any family in Greece,” she said.

The man scoffed. “Everyone in Greece has family,” he said.

“Big families. Huge families. You will like it in Greece. Now tell me about your family in Greece and where they live.”

Lydia tried to remember any family names she heard her father mention, but she could think of none. “Papa said he had to leave Greece in a big hurry.”

The man quirked one of those thick brows. “A big hurry, eh? Why was that?”

“Papa said it was because Mama is a Turk.”

“Oh,” the fisherman said with sad understanding. “That would do it.” He turned to the policeman standing behind him and spoke in English. The words were simple enough even for Lydia to understand.

“This child has no family,” he said.



Mr. Bennett seemed pleased that she was going to an orphanage. It was on the other side of Boston, and the policeman was going to take her there and she would never be coming back to this wonderful school with its nice sturdy desks and clear glass windows. Mr. Bennett hunkered down so he could be at eye level, but she could not bear to look at him when she knew he was saying goodbye to her forever. Mr. Bennett was the only person left in the world who cared about what happened to her, and now she was losing him as well. He took her hand in his and gave it a little tug.

“You will do well,” he said slowly. “You are such a clever girl.”

Her eyes clouded up when he called her a clever girl. She didn’t feel clever right now; she felt weak and scared and alone. But maybe Mr. Bennett was right. Maybe the orphanage would be a wonderful place where she would be able to learn and find a new family.

It did not take long for Lydia to learn there was nothing wonderful about the Crakken Orphanage.



FIFTEEN YEARS LATER, 1891
THE BOSTON NAVY YARD

It looks like the Russian navy has just launched a new gunship,”
Lydia said.

It was hard to tell from the grainy photograph, but the ship looked different from the others reported in the Russian newspapers. Lydia rose from her desk and walked across the office to show the newspaper to Willis, whose encyclopedic memory of warships was astounding. She only hoped he would be willing to help her. She had been working at the research wing of the United States Navy for more than four years, but it still irked Willis that a woman had been hired for this sort of work.

Lydia handed Willis a magnifying glass to better scrutinize the photograph. “I don’t remember the Russians ever having a rotating gun turret,” she said, “but it looks like they have one, don’t you think?”

Willis Colburn was so thin it looked possible to shred cheese

off the blades of his cheekbones. He pushed his spectacles higher as he studied the picture. “You know, Lydia, you are supposed to be the expert on Russian,” he said pointedly.

Actually, Lydia was the expert on Russian, Greek, Turkish, Italian, Albanian, and Croatian. Her job was to scan journals, technical reports, and anything else sent from southern Europe in search of innovations in ship design. When she first saw the job advertisement looking for someone with multiple language skills and an intimate knowledge of ships, she nearly levitated with excitement. Her first two years after leaving the orphanage were difficult, laboring at the fish canneries and packing tins with salted mackerel until she couldn’t see straight. It was monotonous, smelly work, and at the end of the week she was barely able to pay the rent on a room in a boardinghouse, which was why she was so eager to land the job at the Navy Yard. The position called for someone who could read foreign documents and make sense of developments in ship design.

Lydia remembered everything about the sails, tack, and rigging of fishing boats, but when she first saw the imposing battle frigates in the Navy Yard, she wondered if she had overestimated her knowledge of ships.

Admiral Fontaine did not seem to care. A ruggedly attractive man who seemed far too young to have attained the status of admiral, he merely shrugged. “I can teach you the particulars of warships easier than I can train someone in half a dozen languages,” he had said. “You are hired.”

Who could have believed it? The little girl from Greece who grew up on rickety fishing boats and never had a decent pair of shoes was now a trusted assistant to an admiral in the United States Navy. Each day she walked past acres of towering ships docked in the Navy Yard before reporting to work. The office had a view over

the dry docks where navy cruisers and battleships were overhauled and refitted for service.

And Lydia knew her job was vitally important. At the end of the Civil War in 1865, funding for the U.S. Navy had been slashed to the bone as resources were funneled to the army for a massive westward expansion. Other than providing basic coverage of domestic ports, the government lost interest in maintaining a navy. In the midst of one of the greatest technological booms in history, the U.S. Navy became stagnant while the maritime nations of Europe poured funding into ironclads, steamers, torpedoes, and long-range artillery.

It was only after an embarrassing incident when the United States was forced to back down from the Chilean navy that Congress was driven to act. A bureau to collect intelligence on foreign naval technology was created. Naval attachés were sent all across Europe to research shipbuilding technology. Most of the research was aboveboard, but some of it was clandestinely gathered. Whenever those officers found printed material of interest, they sent it home to Admiral Fontaine for a complete translation into English. Each week Lydia received stacks of newspaper clippings, product manuals, and technical journals. She translated, cross-referenced, and indexed every scrap of it.

Watching and trying to play catch-up with the great maritime powers was hardly the way to achieve naval superiority, but at least it provided funding for the team of translators sitting directly outside Admiral Fontaine's office.

"This Russian turret looks a bit like what the British use, don't you think?" Lydia asked Willis, turning the page of the pamphlet to show him the rest of the article, but he cringed and clasped both hands to his forehead.

"Lydia, please. The noise of that paper crackling is like knives

across my skin.” Yesterday the scent of the juice she had been drinking made him dizzy, and last week he complained that the weight of the air was making him suffer a rash. Yet when Admiral Fontaine was in the room, Willis always seemed to be as hardy as a mountain goat.

Lydia lowered the tone of her voice, which often placated Willis, and tried again. “Is this turret the same as what the British have, or is it something entirely new?”

“It is not new,” Karl Olavstad said from his desk on the opposite side of the office. “The Norwegians have had such a turret for at least three years.”

Karl handled the translation work from northern Europe and Scandinavia, while a young man named Jacob Frankenberg tracked western European developments. Willis was a naval historian from London, and his command of shipbuilding throughout the world was unparalleled. He kept track of developments in the British navy and provided insight for everything the team of translators brought to him.

“The Norwegians copied it from the British,” Willis said in a tired voice. “The Norwegian navy would sink to the bottom of the sea if they could not emulate the British.”

Lydia propped her hip against the side of Willis’s desk, eager to see how Karl would respond to the salvo. When she first started work at the Navy Yard, the jousting between her officemates had confused and alarmed her. At the Crakken Orphanage when disagreements broke out among the children, Lydia ran for cover in the broom closet, but she soon learned Karl and Willis enjoyed matching wits.

“Let us hope the Norwegians don’t start emulating British cuisine,” Karl said. “They would perish from the sheer monotony of boiled cabbage, boiled peas, and boiled beef.”

From his desk beside the window overlooking the dry docks, Jacob set down his German newspaper and joined the fray. “Don’t forget boiled tongue,” he said with a shudder. “The only time Willis invited me to his home, his wife served boiled tongue and pickled onions. I had only been in this country two weeks, and it almost sent me rushing back home to Salzburg.”

Lydia knew it would never happen. Every person in this office was an immigrant, and yet each of them had already planted roots as tenacious as those of a mighty oak tree into the rich Boston soil. Was it because she had never had a place to call home that Lydia was so fiercely loyal to Boston and her employment at the Navy Yard? Her respect for Admiral Fontaine certainly had something to do with her pride in working here, but it was more than that. After years of anxiety and loneliness, first at the orphanage and then at the canneries, she had at last found a sense of belonging within the bustling harbor of the Navy Yard. Jacob, Karl, and even the maddening Willis were like a family to her, and she thrived amidst their unconventional friendship.

“What is the proper name of this gun turret?” she asked Willis. “And can you tell me if the gun is smooth-bore or rifled?”

Willis pinched the skin at the top of his nose. “Just tell the admiral it is a Hotchkiss quick-firing gun, modified for shipboard use. That will be adequate for his purposes.”

Lydia fidgeted. She didn’t want her reports to be merely adequate; she wanted them flawless. The report was due by the end of the day, and she needed Willis to cooperate. His teacup was empty, and she knew how much the man adored his Earl Grey blend.

“How about I brew you another cup of tea?” she asked Willis. “By the time I have the water heated, perhaps you can have a list for me of every British and Norwegian ship with the same type of Hotchkiss gun?”

“Deal,” Willis agreed, as she knew he would. The office had a coal-heated burner in the corner of the room, which helped satisfy Willis’s roaring dependency on Earl Grey tea. Lydia opened the trapdoor of the heater and added a few more coals.

“You could afford to ease up a bit, Lydia,” Jacob said. “Not every report needs to be footnoted, cross-referenced, and triple-checked. You’ll make the rest of us look bad. Besides, maybe the admiral fancies a girl who can relax for once.”

Heat flooded her cheeks. That was the second time this month Jacob teased her about liking Admiral Fontaine a little too much. Which was ridiculous. “Jacob, your adolescent imagination is running away again.”

“Come on, Lydia. Plenty of girls are carrying a torch for Admiral Fontaine,” Jacob said. “The lonely widower. Powerful. Rich as sin. Half the girls in Boston are crying into their pillows over him.”

She closed the door of the burner with a clang. Okay, maybe she had a tiny case of hero-worship for the admiral, but never once had she toyed with any ridiculous fantasies. Besides, the admiral’s office was directly behind her, and for all she knew, he could be listening to every word. “First of all,” she said tightly, “I never cry. Ever. And I haven’t prepared my reports for the admiral with any more care than the rest of you.”

Karl did not even lift his nose from where it was buried in the open pages of a Norwegian newspaper, but his voice was pointed. “You learned Albanian for him.”

Jacob pounced on the opening. “Yeah, Lydia, you learned Albanian for him!”

She gritted her teeth. She hadn’t learned Albanian for the admiral; she did it because they had a language deficit in the office and she was the one most likely to quickly master the language. It didn’t mean she carried a torch for the admiral, and she couldn’t

afford to let this sort of talk get out of hand. She set the water in the kettle to heat, then moved to stand beside Jacob's desk. "Please, *please* don't tease me about this," she said, her voice uncharacteristically serious. "You don't know how hard it is for a woman to find professional employment, and any whiff of gossip could cost me my job. Can you understand that?"

Jacob blanched. He didn't have a mean bone in his scrawny body and never considered what his teasing could do to her. "Okay, sorry, Lydia," he quickly agreed, pushing his round spectacles higher up on his nose. "I'm sorry if I said anything—you know—stupid."

Now Lydia felt guilty for scolding. "No man who reads six languages is stupid." She gave him a cuff on the arm. "You idiot."

She returned to tend to the teakettle and added more water. "Make a whole pot, please," Karl said. "The Adonis is coming this afternoon, and you know how surly the admiral is after those meetings."

Her hands froze on the kettle. It was never a good thing when *that man* came to see the admiral.

His name was Lieutenant Banebridge, but Karl had dubbed him "The Adonis" because of the man's ridiculous beauty. None of them understood his mysterious business at the Navy Yard, but after each visit, the admiral was always grim and pensive. Moody, even. Anyone who caused the famously even-tempered Admiral Fontaine to become surly was someone Lydia instinctively mistrusted.

Lydia suspected Lieutenant Banebridge might be one of the foreign attachés funneling them reports about overseas ships, but there was no way for her to know. The man never said a single word to her. He merely breezed into the admiral's office and left a pall behind him with each meeting.

She couldn't afford to worry about the admiral's mysterious

visitor. After setting the kettle over the burner, she opened the canister of tea and let the scent soothe her. If she lived to be one hundred, she would always love the mild scent of Earl Grey tea. Was it because it reminded her of the office? For the first time in her life, she had a job she loved and earned a respectable salary that allowed her to afford a safe apartment of her very own. That apartment had a solid floor, a ceiling that did not leak, and allowed her to fall asleep without fear of vicious children stealing her shoes if she took them off before going to bed.

The door of the office flew open, banging against the wall with a crash. Lydia was stunned to see Big John, the man who owned the coffeeshop on the ground floor of the building where she lived. His face was flushed, and he was barely able to get enough air into his lungs.

“Lydia, you are being evicted,” he said on a ragged breath.

Lydia dropped the canister, scattering loose tea leaves across the floor. “*What?*” The word escaped from her throat in an ungainly screech.

“Workmen just arrived,” he said. “They started putting your furniture on the street outside the building. I told them they can’t evict you yet, but they started anyway.”

“They can’t do this! I have papers saying I can stay. Admiral Fontaine drew them up himself.” Panic flooded her at the thought of losing her home. It was more than mere sentimentality tying her to her modest fourth-floor apartment in a building improbably named the Laughing Dragon. That apartment was her *sanctuary*, the first home in her entire life where Lydia felt completely safe.

She needed to get home right away. “Tell the admiral what is happening,” she called to Jacob as she raced out the door, then clattered down the office staircase and into the street. She hauled

up her skirts and ran as if her life depended on it . . . which it rather did. Since the morning she left the orphanage, she had devoted every hour of her day to earning enough money to create a stable home for herself. Now that she finally had it, she would battle all the plagues of Egypt to keep it.

