



SEA OF SIN

A CREATURES OF SIN NOVEL

INDIA HARPER



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India Harper

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SEA OF SIN: A CREATURES OF SIN NOVELLA

28 Days of Heart Series

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Foreword

“Nothing’s better than a healthy heart, which helps women endure the ailments of life—physical or romantic—and come out on top of it all. This anthology, with stories by some of the most talented romance writers in the market, will benefit hearts everywhere. It’s not often you can contribute to a worthy cause, one that may well affect you in your lifetime, and at the same time assure yourself of some excellent entertainment. Have a good time, and let your heart be your guide.”

Charlaine Harris

Chapter One

In Pittsburgh, Christopher Montgomery was known as Commander, or as Full Monty when his men thought he couldn't hear. Out here on a cruise ship in the middle of the Caribbean, they knew him as Chris. Though some of the younger men on the ship had another name for him.

"Oh, God!"

Chris pulled back to accommodate his partner's release. The young man, Steven—no, Scott came with a hoarse cry of, "Fuck...yeah." He tasted bitter and warm like the sea surrounding them.

Scott watched him through heavy-lidded eyes as he got to his feet. "Jesus, that...fuck."

"I'll take that as a compliment." Chris gave him an expectant look.

"Give a guy a chance," Scott chuckled. "I'm young, but, man, I'm only human." With one last deep, steadying breath, he tugged Chris close. Fishing in Chris' front pocket, Scott withdrew the ubiquitous condom and opened Chris' pants with one hand, the condom with his teeth and the other.

"Wanted to make it worth your while to fuck an old man." He tugged off his t-shirt, eager to feel Scott's firm, well-muscled chest beneath his.

"If you fuck as well as you blow, I want to be just like you when I grow up." Condom in place, Scott curled his legs

around Chris' waist to bring him closer. Chris didn't resist, centering himself in the channel he'd already prepared while blowing Scott. Digging his fingers into Chris' shoulders, Scott lifted his hips as Chris forced his way past resistant muscle. "Fuck, yeah."

This was what Chris came for every year, his annual pilgrimage into anonymity and debauchery. Back home, he was a pillar of his community. Even with the slowly growing acceptance of gays, no one was going to tolerate their police commander sleeping around. It might be different if he'd found someone to settle down with, but he hadn't, and he wasn't a romantic to think the right man was out there waiting for him. Instead, he got as far away from home as he could manage and spent a torrid week satisfying his libido before going back to his celibate life in Pittsburgh.

Bracing one hand on the wall behind Scott's spiky blond head and the other at his waist, Chris set a punishing pace. The slapping sounds of flesh against flesh were backed up by the steady thump of Scott's lean body against thin cabin walls.

"God...damn...harder," Scott grunted.

Chris obliged, burying his cock again and again in Scott's tight ass. He eluded Scott's eager mouth, running teeth and tongue along the long swath of his too vulnerable throat. A fine sheen of sweat and the faint taste of coconut drove Chris on.

He gave in to the need for human contact and lowered himself onto his elbows, savoring the feel of Scott's chest rocking beneath his. Digging his fingers into Scott's shoulders to keep the young man in place, Chris plowed into him even harder. Scott gasped, pressing his face against Chris' shoulder, and Chris felt him clench despite his earlier protests about his recovery time. Chris let go of his own control right before Scott arched beneath him, his orgasm enough to bring Chris off as well.

He savored that mindless, fleeting moment of bliss that always followed climax, where the world went away and

everything felt...good. But invariably, reality and physiology conspired against him.

“Why do I feel like it’s all going to be downhill from here?” Scott said as they started to redress.

“My ego thanks you.” Chris fastened his pants, lips twisting wryly. “But we haven’t even left port yet. It’s a little early for such dire predictions.”

“Well, anytime you’re up for a repeat...” Scott straightened his uniform jacket and slipped out the door.

Chris stretched in satisfaction. Starting the week by banging his cabin steward was probably on the desperate side, but it got him back in the groove and guaranteed him great service for the rest of the cruise.

There was nothing better than escaping from the responsibilities of his life back in Pittsburgh for a week. He loved his job and couldn’t imagine doing anything but working among Pittsburgh’s finest. However, being the respected, though approachable, leader got exhausting.

When his phone rang with a cheery chorus of Frank Sinatra’s *The Good Life* he checked it first to confirm it wasn’t someone from the office trying to drag him back home. He recognized his travel agent’s number and answered it. “Diane, my dear, how are you?”

“Not as good as you, from the sound of it. You’re sounding better already.”

“I’m feeling better already, thanks to you.” And Scott.

“I wanted to make sure your flight went well and everything on the ship is to your satisfaction before you get out of phone range.”

He glanced around his large suite with the balcony overlooking the pool and the generous gift basket in the kitchenette. “Couldn’t be better. You’ve done your usual bang up job, sweetheart.”

“I do my best to ensure repeat business.” She meant it, too. It was what made her such a great travel agent. “Have a wonderful trip and don’t be afraid to drop my name if anyone asks.”

“Thanks again.” Chris was tempted to power off the phone after he disconnected. His new lieutenant, David Logan, was more than capable of handling the department while he was gone. Still, he left the phone on to be safe. He’d be out of range in a half hour anyway.

After freshening up, he pocketed his mobile and headed out on deck to watch as the ship left port.

It wasn’t difficult to find a place at the rail with a view of the dock behind them and the Caribbean ahead. In a bygone era, the dockside rail would have been teeming with people frantically waving goodbye to family and friends, but in this cynical postmodern age, there was no one to see them off but the dockworkers and a handful of loved ones.

“It’s a little sad.”

To his surprise, he was no longer alone at the rail.

The man appeared close to him in age. Much closer than Scott the steward. He was broad shouldered, sandy hair touched with gray and in an artfully chaotic short cut hinting at waves if he grew it out. If he were twenty years younger, Chris would have pursued him.

Instead, he kept his manner casual and the charm low. “This is a much better turnout than last year.”

“I wouldn’t know. This is my first time.”

“I gathered. I know most of the regulars. Chris.” He offered his hand. “Chris Montgomery.”

The man took it with a firm grip that lingered promisingly. “Kieran Philips.”

“Welcome aboard, Kieran Philips. You’re in for quite a ride.”

Kieran's smile intensified the deep character lines in a manner that wasn't unattractive. "So I'm learning. I have the cabin next to yours."

Chris hadn't blushed in decades, and he didn't now. But he did feel warmer than a moment ago. "I spend the year passing up opportunities and make it a rule not to do the same here."

"Makes sense."

"You do understand what kind of a cruise this is?"

"I hadn't."

"Then why are you here?"

Kieran shrugged. "I had time off from a demanding job and this was the only gay-friendly trip available."

"You might want to have words with your travel agent."

"I don't blame her. After all, it's not as if the brochure says 'ten-day, all-inclusive same sex floating orgy'."

"It does gloss that over a bit," Chris agreed, his tone light.

"A bit."

"If you steer clear of the pool deck and the twenty-somethings, you'll find things less hedonistic."

"I'll keep that in mind." Kieran's blue eyes held an equal mix of intensity and mirth. "I get the feeling that's where you tend to hang out."

"It's my next stop."

"Then back to your room. Presumably."

"I can afford a much nicer room than most of the twenty-somethings." Chris found their conversation far more arousing than the topic warranted.

"I'll make sure to be in the lounge while you're...hosting, then."

"And I'll keep my...hosting to the opposite side of the cabin."

“It’s appreciated. Although,” Kieran’s gaze dropped pointedly to Chris’ mouth, “I have to admit my curiosity is piqued.”

While Kieran might not be Chris’ preferred hookup, he had a certain appeal that Chris couldn’t deny. Besides, the whole point of this trip was to make up for all those other opportunities he passed up during the year. Maybe he was limiting his options. He moved closer. “Are you looking for a demonstration?”

Kieran chuckled. “With the speed you’ve moved already, I suspect I’m going to get plenty of demonstrations. Go look for your next conquest, Christopher. You aren’t ready for me yet.”

The only people who got to call him Christopher were his mother and the chief of police, and even then he didn’t particularly like it. Yet the way Kieran said it... “That sounds like a challenge.”

Kieran pushed off from the rail, brushing against Chris’ arm, and started down the deck. “You could use a challenge,” he called back.

Chris looked forward to the next time they ran into each other. Until then... Turning in the opposite direction, he headed towards the pool. Scott had taken the edge off, but the encounter with Kieran had left him oddly unbalanced. He needed to get back to his planned debauchery and get this vacation back on track.

Chapter Two

He didn't even have to work at it.

His age made him a novelty, so that the young men came to him, either out of curiosity or a father fixation or because of things they'd heard. By the afternoon of the second day, Chris was definitely feeling more relaxed.

He lay in his lounge chair by the pool, not even pretending to read the mindless suspense novel he'd purchased. He was there for the sun and the sights, dozing occasionally but overall being available. It paid off when a warm hand caressed down his bare chest before a pair of now familiar lips brushed his. He opened his eyes to find Terry crouched beside him, a look of utter contentment on his face. "Last night was great."

Chris curled his arm around Terry's waist, enjoying the play of young, taut muscle and sun warmed skin. "I'm glad you had a good time."

"Are you coming to the disco tonight?"

He shook his head. "I'm not much of a dancer."

Terry grinned. "I guess you can't be good at everything." He leaned in for another kiss, lips dancing against Chris' as he spoke. "Half a dozen of us are getting together afterwards to play for a while. We'd love it if you joined us."

It was tempting. That many eager, horny bodies doing unspeakably pleasurable things to each other was better than any porn. The thought of getting to participate in something

like that was a bit intimidating, though, even for a man with his confidence.

Running his hand along Terry's lean flank, Chris went with the rule of the cruise. "I'll see how my evening goes."

Terry kissed him one last time before pulling back and standing up. "Well, we'd really love to have you."

Chris watched him go, tight and unabashedly flexible as only the really young were. If Terry's friends were anything like him, Chris would have to check things out.

"I'm curious when you find time to sleep."

Chris retrieved his sunglasses and put them on before looking up at Kieran, who studied him with open curiosity.

"Plenty of time to sleep back home."

Kieran glanced over to where Terry was bent over to talk to someone in the pool. "He's pretty enough. How's his conversation?"

"I don't come for the conversation."

"No, it's definitely not the conversation that makes you come."

Chris barked a laugh, motioning to the free lounge beside him. "Have a seat."

"That's not going to interfere with your plans?" The low, teasing note in Kieran's voice was pleasant to hear.

"No fear of that. I have to admit, I'm surprised to see you down here."

Sitting, Kieran slipped out of his polo to reveal a fine smattering of light, wiry hair and surprising definition. He reclined back and said, "Without jetlag weighing me down, I'm more amenable to exploring my...options, as you would say."

"Shouldn't take long for your options to open up." Not looking like that. He wasn't ripped like the younger men here, but most men in their forties weren't. That took a combination of time and ego that most of them outgrew, thank God. It was exhausting. Just because he liked fucking twenty-somethings

didn't mean he wanted to be one again. He had maintained his physique mostly as part of his job. He wondered if the same was true for Kieran. The man didn't strike him as an egotist.

Sure enough, barely had Kieran settled in his lounge when a tall brunet appeared, offering a bottle of beer dripping with condensation. "You look like you could use a drink."

Kieran cocked an eyebrow at him as Chris fought to remain the impassive observer. "Oh? And why's that?"

"Because you're hot."

Chris lost it at Kieran's incredulous expression.

Kieran glared at him. "I can see why you forgo conversation."

The young man wasn't fazed. Setting the bottle down beside Kieran, he leaned in close and said, "The name's Benny. I'll be around."

Kieran shook his head as Benny walked off. "Thick skinned and persistent. He'll go far."

"You're really not impressed with the younger set," Chris observed.

Taking a sip of the beer, Kieran swallowed and gave a small nod of approval. "I'm impressed, don't get me wrong. But I got enough of the younger set when I was one of the younger set."

"The good old days?"

"Hardly." He began fingering the bottle in a way that fascinated Chris. "I was more than happy to see the back side of twenty."

"Aren't we all?"

Kieran quirked an eyebrow.

"Just because I like twenty-something backsides doesn't mean I want to be twenty again," he voiced his earlier thoughts. Fuck no. On top of the regular joys the twenties brought, he'd also been in his first years on the force, trying to

reconcile his sexual desires with his career goals. He wouldn't go back for anything.

"Maybe you're a little more grown up than I thought."

"This is a different world. Out there? You wouldn't recognize me."

Kieran let his gaze run along Chris' body, full of promise. "I don't know about that."

"Is that so." Feeling bold, Chris rolled to face him. "Why don't we go up to my room and...discuss it?"

"No thanks." Kieran closed his eyes and shifted in the chair to settle more comfortably. "I'm going to catch up on my rest and get some sun. Maybe if I'm lucky one of these young studs will come along and molest me while I'm unconscious so I don't have to do all the work for a change."

Again, there was an evident challenge underlying his words. Kieran was interested, but Chris had yet to figure out what would spur the man into action. He could wait.

"I don't think luck is an issue. You've picked up a couple other admirers in addition to Benny."

Kieran's thin lips quirked, although he didn't open his eyes. "Better put out the *Do Not Disturb* sign, then."

Chris was itching to disturb him and couldn't figure out why. Instead he got up and dove into the pool, looking for some peace of mind and a partner who wasn't so resistant to his charms.

Chris was leaving his stateroom for dinner when he ran into Kieran again, hair damp and skin showing the faintest hint of sunburn.

"Don't tell me you're actually going to dinner," Kieran said as he unlocked his door.

"A man needs to keep up his strength."

Leaning against the doorjamb, he gave Chris another one of those appraising once-overs. “True. By the time you and Benny crawled out of the pool and disappeared, I was pretty certain you wouldn’t emerge until tomorrow.”

“That was more in the way of afternoon delight.” Chris didn’t feel guilty. Much. That was the way the game was played. Running a hand through his hair, he asked, “You don’t mind, do you?”

“About Benny?” Kieran snorted. “Hardly. Young men aren’t really my type. They’re fun to flirt with, but too much work in bed.”

The man didn’t mince words, did he? “You won’t see much action around here with that attitude.”

“I prefer quality to quantity anyway.” He opened the door. “I’m just about to change for dinner. If you don’t mind waiting, we can go down together.”

“I don’t mind.” At all. An invitation in more often than not led to an invitation *in*.

“Great.” Kieran held the door for him. “I suspect you know where the scotch is.”

Since every room on this level was a copy of his, Chris had no problem finding the bar while Kieran disappeared into the other room. “Do you want one?” he called out, pulling down the glasses.

“A short one, thanks. Neat.”

“Here I thought you were going to say straight.”

Kieran appeared in the doorway, bare chested again, to give him a dirty look. “I see your humor hasn’t caught up with your age.”

Chris winked at him and poured the booze.

He glanced up again in time to see Kieran standing naked in front of his closet, pulling out a clean shirt. It was an impressive view, his thighs as strong and softly defined as his chest, the faintest shadow on the side of his cheek promising

the taut strength there. For one overwhelming moment Chris wanted to kneel down and worship that ass with his tongue until Kieran was begging him to fuck it. Then Kieran was gone again, leaving Chris rock hard and embarrassed.

He swallowed half of his very tall scotch in one mouthful.

When Kieran emerged again, he wore a pair of dark slacks that hid nothing and didn't dampen Chris' libido an iota.

"You're doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

Kieran slipped on a white button-up, leaving it open, and came over to retrieve his drink. "Getting dressed? Yes, I often do that on purpose."

"That's not what I meant." Taking the glass back and setting it on the bar top, Chris rested his hands on Kieran's waist. "You don't have to play this game. We could skip dinner and go straight to dessert."

Kieran caressed Chris' chest through the starched cotton of his shirt. "We could. We could spend the rest of the night in the bed, on the couch, bent over the bar."

God, that sounded good. "Sounds pleasant," Chris said casually.

"But if we do that, then I won't be any better than one of those boys you've been picking up."

"I'm all right with that."

"I'm not." Kieran stepped back and reclaimed his scotch, his eyes never once leaving Chris'.

Exasperated, Chris growled, "What do you want from me?"

"Plenty. And if you're lucky, you might find out." Smiling Kieran swallowed the last of his drink and set the glass down again. "Come on, we're going to be late."

Chris caught Kieran's arm as he started buttoning his shirt. "I didn't come here for a shipboard romance, Kieran."

"Who said anything about a romance?" Kieran shrugged off Chris' hand to finish his buttons and tuck the tail of his shirt

into his slacks. "Think of this as more in the way of a seduction. You've had things entirely too easy, Christopher. It's time you had to work at it for a change."

"You know I can just pick someone up down at dinner."

"I'm sure you can. In fact, I'm certain you will." Amusement deepened the fine character lines of his face. "But I'm equally certain that at some point in the middle of your *coitus delicti*, you're going to have one brief moment where you wonder how different things would be if I were the one beneath you instead of whatever handsome juvenile you find."

If Chris wasn't before, he would now. The challenge was...intriguing, but he didn't come on vacation to work. Yet he wasn't walking away, was he? There had to be some way to get under Kieran's skin.

"You're right, we're going to be late." Chris headed for the door.

Joining him, Kieran looped an arm over his shoulders and leaned in close. "Whatever you're thinking of doing, it won't work, Christopher."

Kieran was halfway down the deck before Chris recovered enough to think of a comeback. His own name shouldn't have so much power over him. "Damn."

Chapter Three

“Oh yeah, just like that.”

Will had been in line ahead of Chris at the buffet. They had met while reaching for the same slice of beef and spent a pleasant meal talking about nothing of any significance. Will still tasted of wine and chocolate mousse when he kissed Chris on the promenade afterwards, an invitation Chris had seen no reason not to take up. So far, that had been an excellent decision.

Will was bent over the foot of Chris’ bed, his muscular backside presented for Chris’ pleasure, a fact that Chris was taking full advantage of. “You like that?” he demanded, driving his cock a little deeper.

“God, yes...” Will’s muscles tightened a fraction, then relaxed, enticing Chris on. So goddamn close— “Harder, Christopher...fuck.”

A bucket of cold water couldn’t have pulled him out of the moment more effectively.

Christopher. Low, seductive and promising so much, but never delivering—

“Uh...Chris? Is everything...all right?”

Son of a bitch.

He couldn’t stop, not now, or he’d never hear the end of it. So he struggled to keep thrusting despite his deflating cock.

Desperate, he reached around to grip Will's dick in a fierce grip, stroking in rapid syncopation to his decelerating thrusts.

It was enough. Will came with a hoarse cry, spilling wet and hot over Chris' fist. He pulled out while Will was still lost in the moment, ducking into bathroom to bin the condom and pull himself together.

Will was reclined against the pillows when he came back, looking sated but confused. "Did I do something wrong?"

"God, no." Chris sat on the bed next to him, caressing his short hair before leaning in for a kiss. "You were great. I just lost control towards the end there."

Will relaxed. "I like that. I don't often make someone lose control."

Chris didn't disillusion him. "Are you still planning to go to the club tonight?"

"It's tempting to stay here with you instead."

Chris let Will draw him down for another lingering kiss before pulling back. "Your friends will be waiting."

"Let them."

Chris had picked the wrong partner too well. If it weren't for Kieran, he and Will would be well on their way to round two of what should have been a long, sweat drenched, satisfying night. Instead he couldn't get the young man out the door fast enough.

His hesitation, however brief, was enough to get through to Will.

"Or not. Sorry, I get a little pushy sometimes." He shrugged and got out of the bed. "But can you blame me for wanting more of a good thing?"

Chris smiled, and it wasn't completely forced. "No, I can't."

Pants on, Will ran a hand through his hair and slung his shirt over his shoulder. "If you change your mind, you know where to find me." After a lingering look, he was gone.

“Thank God,” Chris muttered. But relief was fleeting and soon replaced by frustration and no small amount of anger at the man next door.

There was no point in going back down now to try again. He didn’t want to burn any bridges with Will, and there really wasn’t any point. These sorts of thing tended to build on themselves until he wouldn’t be able to get it up at all. Better that he have a drink, get himself off, and get some sleep. By tomorrow, the power of Kieran’s words would have weakened and Chris could get back to enjoying his vacation.

Dressing in a pair of cotton sleep pants, he took his scotch out on the balcony. The air was sweet and moist, clinging to his bare skin without the oppressive heat of the day. Below him, the deck was empty of all of the sun worshippers, only a few couples out at this time of night to make use of the semi-privacy afforded by the place. The soft susurrations of water churning away from the hull as the ship cut through the Caribbean whispered in his ears its own soothing melody. Chris took a deep, cleansing breath and used it to blow out his frustrations.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you again until morning.”

So much for relaxing. Chris didn’t turn around. “You don’t sound surprised, though.”

Kieran chuckled. “Actually, I am. I figured you’d spend the evening trying to fight it.”

“Or imagining I was fucking you instead?”

“Trust me, your imagination isn’t that good.”

Still not turning, Chris said, “I’m beginning to think you’re all talk, Kieran. Or you get off on my not getting off.”

The low rumble of Kieran’s amusement was much closer this time, and soon a warm body molded against his, strong arms encircling his waist as a chin rested on his shoulder. “I can assure you, Christopher, I’m plenty of action. When the time is right.”

“Don’t call me that.” Taking a chance, he covered Kieran’s arms with his own, the action undermining the request.

“Why not?”

“Because it drives me crazy.”

“I know. That’s why I do it.” Kieran’s lips caressed his ear deliberately. “I want you thinking about what it will sound like when I call you Christopher in the heat of the moment, how good it’s going to sound in the middle of your orgasm.”

Chris shivered and told himself it was from the breeze. “Why me?”

He meant the question rhetorically, but Kieran answered. “Why not you? You’re confident and sexy as hell and you haven’t been challenged for a very long time. Have you?”

“I don’t come here for a challenge. If I wanted to work for it, I could have stayed home.”

“Admit it, you’re enjoying the challenge. The anticipation is killing you better than any toss-off with one of those kids. And you know when it comes, when *you* come, it’s not going to be a quick ten minutes and then on to the next one. It’s going to take hours and quite possibly days and it’s going to be the best sex you’ve ever had in your whole fucking life.”

The pathetic thing was he was beginning to believe that. “That’s a lot to live up to.”

Blunt teeth caught at his ear. “I never promise what I can’t deliver.” Kieran urged him to turn and soon they stood nose to nose. “The question here, though, is whether or not you can handle delayed gratification.”

“You aren’t giving me much of a choice.”

“Sure I am.” Lips that had teased at Chris’ ear now brushed over his mouth. “Walk away. Go back to your casual, meaningless encounters with beautiful young men and forget I was ever here.”

He'd tried that and it had nearly ended in disaster. "Kieran, I—"

The rest of his words were lost as Kieran claimed his mouth, as subtle and smooth as every other one of his actions. Chris fought his natural impulse to take control, take what he'd been wanting since he first set eyes on Kieran, and instead let Kieran continue to lead.

He was rewarded with the faintest of smiles against his lips as Kieran drew him closer, letting him feel the full length of his tormentor's body while his mouth teased and coaxed with expert skill and patience. Nothing hurried, nothing rushed, just a kiss for the sake of the kiss alone.

Chris couldn't recall the last time he'd enjoyed such a simple act.

Gradually, Kieran withdrew from the kiss but maintained full-body contact with Chris. "Was that worth waiting for?"

There was only one answer. "Yes."

"Remember that." Then he stepped back, turned, and disappeared back into his stateroom.

Standing there with the taste of Kieran still fresh on his lips, Chris stared at the closed door, dumbfounded. He should be mad. Instead, he felt...anticipation.

Chapter Four

Chris avoided the pool deck. After Kieran's kiss last night, he knew he would be hard pressed to accept any of the invitations that he knew would come his way there. Rather than ruin his reputation, he dug out the long, convoluted novel he'd purchased with no intention of reading, and took it up to the sun deck to work on his tan and try to sort out the confusing relationship he was developing with Kieran. Relationship. The one thing he avoided and somehow managed to walk into despite all his plans.

There was no denying the attraction between them. Chris would have been happy to have spent the rest of last night making out with Kieran, the kiss had been that good. The promise of Kieran's solid, broad body against his served to heighten Chris' fascination. But he didn't have a clue what it would take to convince Kieran to take that next step. They were already on the third day of the trip. Chris wasn't sure he'd figure it out in the remaining four. If he missed out, or if he found that Kieran was playing him along, he'd have a whole year to regret it. Talk about a long fucking year.

The book was snatched out of his hand. "Times must be desperate if you're really reading this." Kieran grimaced. Dropping the book onto Chris' lap, he sat down on the lounge beside him. "I wouldn't have figured you for the type."

"A *Times* Bestseller? Yes, several million must be wrong."

“Oh, they can be and frequently are.”

“God, you’re a book critic, aren’t you? No...professor.” Chris found his annoyance quickly giving way to...something better. “Frustrated writer?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” He answered with a devilish grin. “I’ve learned the rules here. Leave the outside world outside. No one talks about where they’re from or what they do. Limits the options for conversation quite a bit, which judging from Benny’s feeble attempts at conversation isn’t always a bad thing. But hey, now we can talk about books.”

“Not if you’re going to insult my choices.”

Kieran fixed him with a look. “You don’t seriously think that’s good, do you?”

Chris chuckled. “No, it’s crap. But it’s also mindless entertainment, which I need since my other avenues of mindless entertainment are out of the question at the moment.”

“So you’re saying,” Kieran’s voice dropped to the low rumble that promised everything, “that I’ve ruined you for other men.”

“Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Maybe. Although I have to admit, I’ll miss the pornographic soundtrack coming from your room.”

“It’s not that bad.”

“Oh?”

“Fine, my partners can be a bit...exuberant.”

“Your partners. Right.”

“We could always test it.” Sitting up, he laid the book on the side table and leaned closer to Kieran, catching the scent of Kieran’s own clean muskiness under layers of suntan lotion. “Let’s go downstairs and you can find out in person how loud I can get.”

The fingers of Kieran’s left hand splayed across Chris’ chest, equally a restraint and a caress. “One step forward and three back. You don’t go in for subtle much, do you?”

"I spend the other fifty-one weeks out of the year being subtle and responsible." But he sat back. "Why waste time being anything but direct?"

"Maybe because the thing earned is the one worth having."

"What do you want me to do then?" God, that didn't sound like begging, did it? He had his limits. One fantastic kiss and a lot vague promises hadn't given him all that much insight into Kieran.

Kieran picked up the novel and seemed to take pity on him. "Talk to me about books. Ask me out for a drink."

"Are you asking me to court you?"

"I'm asking you to show me you're interested in more than my cock. That you can get anywhere."

Chris hadn't gone out for drinks in a dating capacity for...well, since he'd entered a leadership role on the force and hit upon the annual cruise to fulfill his needs. "Would you like to have drinks with me tonight?" It couldn't have come out any lamer.

It appeared that Kieran agreed. "The delivery could use some work, but yes, I will."

"Good." Chris was out of practice at this. He had the you want me, I want you, let's fuck quick arbitration down to the fine art. Conversation and getting to really know his prospective partner first was so not something he did anymore. "If you don't read the dreck of the masses, what do you read?"

That wicked grin was back. "With my job? I don't have time to read."

Chris threw the book at him.

"Watch it, those things are deadly."

"Death by paperback, that would be a new one." Though a librarian at Duquesne had been severely concussed by the *Oxford Dictionary* when he was a rookie.

Kieran stood up, book in hand as he started reading the back cover. "Maybe I should try this one, since I've got a few days to kill."

Chris reached for the book, but Kieran moved it out of his reach. "That one's mine. Get your own."

Kieran held it further out of his reach. "Seeing how you're throwing it around, I don't think you deserve it."

Chris gaped at him.

That earned him a laugh and Kieran tossed it back to him. "God, you almost make it too easy."

"You're determined to drive me crazy, aren't you?"

"So long as I have your undivided attention, I'm satisfied."

Kieran had that whether Chris wanted to give it to him or not.

They sat there in silence, until Kieran said, "I changed my mind." Before Chris' hopes could rise too high, Kieran added, "Ask me to drinks now."

Irritated, Chris gave some of his own back. "No, I don't think I will."

"Tired of me already?"

Chris didn't answer.

"Fine. How about this, then?" Kieran changed seats to perch on the edge of Chris' lounge. "I would very much like it if you would come down to the lounge with me for a drink. We can talk about something safe. Like sports."

It was hard to resist Kieran's charm. "You think sports is a safe topic?"

Kieran pulled away in horror. "You aren't a Yankees fan, are you?"

"No, but you just gave a little of yourself away with that comment. Now I know you're not from New York."

“One city down, hundreds more to go. Assuming I live in a city or I’m not a Mets fan.”

“How do I even know you’re from this planet?”

“You think Yankees’ hatred is a universal phenomenon?”

Annoyance to enjoyment in no time flat. Kieran had a gift. “If not, it should be.”

“Damn right. Now how about that drink?”

Chris surrendered and got up from the chair. “All right. But don’t think you’re going to get me drunk and take advantage of me.”

“You wish.”

Chapter Five

On the way to the lounge, they came across the line for the day-trip ashore to Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe.

“Much better,” Kieran said and went to have a quick word with the concierge. A moment later he guided Chris to the back of the group.

“You aren’t serious.”

“What? It’s all part of the cruise package. Why not take advantage?”

Chris wanted to protest about drinks, but Kieran’s next words caught him off guard.

“I’m sure you know a good bar or two on the island. That beats the lounge any day.”

Chris was almost ashamed to admit, “In all the years I’ve been coming on this cruise, I’ve never actually left the ship.”

He chanced a look at Kieran who appeared to be trying not to laugh. “Somehow that doesn’t surprise me.” Kieran closed the distance between them as the line moved forward. “I’d say it’s time you tried something new.”

“Oh, I think I’m definitely in uncharted waters,” Chris deadpanned. “Ever since I met you I’ve been all at sea.”

“Murdering maritime analogies won’t help your case any.”

“No, but it will make me feel better.”

Rolling his eyes, Kieran led the way onto the boat ferrying them to the island.

Ten minutes later, they arrived and disembarked. Chris was struck, as he always was, by how still solid ground was in comparison to the ship. He never really noticed the subtle movement out at sea until he was away from it.

Kieran rejoined him after having what seemed to be a very intense conversation with their ferryman. "I've got the perfect place for an early dinner. With drinks."

"Why does that worry me?"

"Have I steered you wrong yet?"

"Hell if I know."

"Come on. Sightseeing first and then rum."

Even as they made their way through the crowds of hawkers meeting the ship, Chris protested, "Are you sure that shouldn't be the other way around?"

"Are you always this miserable?"

"Only when I don't get my way."

"You've been spoiled, Christopher." To his surprise, Kieran took his hand. "If you don't try new things, you'll never know if you're missing out on something really good."

The skin of Kieran's palm was mostly smooth save for the faint calluses at the tips of his fingers, and a larger one on the inside edge of his middle finger. The former made him think musician, while the latter... "You still write longhand, don't you?" He ran his thumb over the spot in question. "Not many people get this anymore."

The corner of Kieran's mouth quirked up. "Can't type to save my life, so I don't really have much choice." His blue eyes were intense. "What are you, a detective?"

Kieran was more right than he knew. "Oh no, the real world has no place here. First rule of the cruise."

"I thought that was to get laid as often as possible."

“No, that’s just my rule. Which I seem to be having a hard time following.”

Kieran eyed him. “Would you rather go back to the ship and ball a couple of twink’s?”

Chris winced at his behavior being described so bluntly. “Not now that you’ve put it that way.”

“Then what are we hanging around here for?”

Pointe-a-Pitre turned out to be a quaint city with its mix of modern and scattered colonial buildings. While there were a few museums, it became apparent pretty quickly that Pointe-a-Pitre’s main draw was the shopping, with a number of boutiques specializing in goods from France. Shopping had never been of much interest to Chris and he was glad to find out the same held true for Kieran.

Just off the Place de la Victorie they found a lively outdoor café/bar. “The launch driver says this is the place all the locals go,” Kieran explained as they found a table. “So what do you think of the town?”

Seated, Chris took in the surroundings. “It’s nice, I’ll give you that.”

“But?”

“I really wasn’t missing all that much by staying on the boat.”

Kieran shook his head. “Ye of little faith. Let’s order first, then you can pass judgment.”

The waiter greeted them in a smattering of broken English until Kieran took pity on him and ordered in clear, well-inflected French, which clearly thrilled the waiter. When he left to deliver their order to the kitchen, Kieran grinned. “I think we may be getting a complimentary bottle of wine for that.”

“I’m impressed. Have you been to Paris?”

“Isn’t that real world information?”

“Since when is Paris the real world?”

“Then yes, I lived in Paris for six months when I was...younger.”

“What, a year younger? That sounded pretty fluent to me.”

“I’ve had the good fortune to keep my skills from getting rusty. Which is all you’re going to get out of me.” Kieran’s eyes danced. “What about you? Any languages?”

“My Spanish is passable.” More so after the semi-mandatory refresher course he’d had to take in the spring. “Comprehension is passable, I should say. Speaking usually gets me laughed at. Though, when you make an effort, people tend to take pity on you and are considerably more accommodating.”

Kieran took a sip of the wine the waiter delivered with a happy flourish. “What else is fair game? Educational history?”

Chris shook his head, reaching for his own glass. “Too easy to infer career choices or past and present residence. That rules out sports teams as well.”

“Music preferences?”

Chris thought about that one for a moment. “Seems safe.”

“So?”

“I have to go first?”

“I went first on the languages.”

“Only out of sheer happenstance.”

Kieran leaned across the table. “You’re into boy bands, aren’t you?”

Nearly choking on the wine he’d just drunk, Chris glared at Kieran. “Give me some credit.”

“Girl bands? Pussycat Dolls, maybe?”

“Jesus, that’s just cruel. And a bunch of scantily clad women prancing around a stage is not a band. To be a band, at least some of the members need to play actual instruments.”

Laughing, Kieran sat back. “Touched a sore spot there.” He studied Chris more seriously. “Okay, I’m guessing that

you're old school. The Doors, Cream, maybe later Beatles, possibly some Bowie."

"Not bad, but The Stones instead of The Doors, and Sinatra for variety."

"Sinatra." Kieran looked doubtful. "You don't strike me as the Sinatra type."

Chris shrugged and took another sip of the wine, light but tart. He preferred beer or scotch, but for wine, this wasn't half bad. "He's a classic. You can't knock a classic."

"I'm not, even if Dean Martin was better. But," Kieran fixed him with a look, "Sinatra just doesn't fit you."

"The blame falls to my first...well, not exactly boyfriend, but close enough," Chris explained. "I was still young enough to want to do anything and everything I could to impress him. He was a Rat Pack fanatic, so I got into it that way. After we went our separate ways, Sinatra stuck."

"Ah, so there is a lost love in your past. I had wondered."

"If that's what made me gunshy? Hate to disappoint you, but it really wasn't. We just went different directions." He wondered where Charlie was these days. Probably still selling Beemers, if he was still alive. "Your turn."

"Heavy metal, Bob Dylan, some electronica, Wagner and Beethoven." Kieran refilled their glasses and added, "And of course, Dean Martin."

"In other words, you tend to like your music hard and loud."

"That's about right."

"Like your men?" Chris asked hopefully.

Kieran chuckled. "I have to give you points for persistence. But on that point you'll just have to wait and see."

"But I will see?" Chris pressed.

"Maybe."

Before he could respond, their waiter returned with their appetizer.

Tempting as it was to force the issue, he let it go. Instead the two of them spent the rest of the meal negotiating safe topics of conversation, teasing each other with tidbits of forbidden knowledge and basically enjoying each other's company.

"Cheerleading competitions. That's my guilty TV pleasure," Kieran confessed.

Chris thought he was joking, but the man looked dead serious. "Cheerleading?"

"Cheerleading competitions."

"But that's so..."

"Gay?"

"Well, yeah."

"At least it's a real competition unlike *Survivor*."

"I told you, I watch that purely for entertainment."

"Same with me and cheerleading."

"But it's cheerleading!"

"Those girls are fierce. I wouldn't want to run into one in a dark alley. They drop you in a heartbeat."

Chris doubted that, given his police training, but that was one of the subjects that was off limits. "Most guys watch it for the T and A. You must be the only man in the world who watches for the athleticism."

"There are plenty of guys in it as well. Too young, but nice to look at. Right up your alley."

"Hey now..."

Kieran grinned.

A scuffle near the bar drew both their attention. As the day had worn on, the surrounding crowd had changed accordingly. The late afternoon patrons were considerably more exuberant than the lunchtime counterparts.

The conversation at the bar escalated and the anger between the participants was clear despite the language barrier.

“Oh, that was dumb,” Kieran groaned.

“What?”

“The blond on the right just insulted tattoo boy’s mother.”

Some things were universal.

Chris was already getting up from his chair. “We should probably do something before it gets out of hand.”

Kieran followed him. “The *gendarmes* will handle it. That’s what they get paid for.”

It was what Chris got paid for, too, but that fell under forbidden knowledge. “Unfortunately, they aren’t here and we are.”

“I knew you were going to say that.”

Nevertheless, he was right by Chris’ side as they drew up to the now slightly larger group. Blondie had three friends to Tattoo’s four and things were getting uglier fast. Chris intercepted Blondie’s punch and earned the full attention of both side.

“There are better ways to resolve this than beating the shit out of each other.”

Tattoo’s nearest backup growled. “The American should mind his own business.”

Chris stared him down. “The American is doing you a favor. Settle this elsewhere before the *gendarmes* come and settle it for you.”

“The *gendarmes* don’t interfere in personal matters.”

“But this isn’t personal anymore, is it?” Kieran pointed out reasonably. “Now there are a couple of American *touristes* involved, and I doubt your law enforcement officials would look too kindly on anyone damaging the city’s reputation with the visitors.”

“Then, as they say in your country, fuck you.”

Backup lunged, tackling Kieran to the ground. Before Chris could help, Blondie and one of his cohorts attacked him. It pretty much became a blur from that point on.

Chris was bigger than most of their attackers, and they certainly weren't expecting to be facing a trained fighter. The first two went down in screams of pain before the others got wary. Chris used the reprieve to back up to Kieran, who wasn't fighting so much as evading the attacks against him.

"Let me guess," he asked breathlessly, "former military?"

"Close enough." Chris punched an oncoming attacker in the face and was fairly certain he felt bones crackle under his knuckles.

"Which part? The military or the former?"

"That would be telling."

"Would that really be so bad?" Kieran dodged another attack and landed a solid hit to his assailant's solar plexus.

"Nice hit."

"Thanks."

"And yes, it's better this way."

"Safer, you mean."

Breaking glass caught Chris' attention and he turned just in time to stop Tattoo from doing serious damage with a lethal looking bottle, catching his wrist and wrenching it up behind his back in a well practiced disarm.

Everyone froze at the sound of sirens. The kids who were able to began to scatter.

Their waiter approached them through the debris. "*DeparteZ-vous*, yes? The *gendarmes*, they...*ne sont pas heureux* to view you. Yes?"

"*Oui*," Kieran responded. Pulling out his wallet, he slipped the man something that looked significantly larger than a twenty. "Come on, Christopher. Let's let these nice people do their jobs."

Chris' professional instincts were to stay and report in to the local constabulary, but Kieran was probably right. It would be hard to explain things, especially if the officers were aware of the nature of their particular cruise. The fact that he was an American policeman wouldn't help matters and might actually make things worse. Surrendering, he followed Kieran out the back door.

They fell in step side by side, making their way back to the harbor where they could see their ship off in the distance.

"Nice night," Kieran observed.

"Are all dates with you this exciting?"

Kieran grinned. "Not *this* exciting."

Chris chuckled. "Oh, well, that's good."

"Have I ruined you for shore visits?"

"That remains to be seen," he said leadingly.

"You never quit."

"Very rarely." A horn sounded in the distance. "Another sign that we've overstayed our welcome here."

"But it was fun."

"Yeah," Chris agreed as they picked up their pace, "it was."

Chapter Six

When they re-boarded the ship, the aches of exertion were just beginning to make themselves known. Between the sun and the wine and the adrenaline of the fight, he was weary. For all the right reasons for a change.

“Are you all right?” Kieran asked when he reached his door.

“Me? Yeah.” Chris roused himself. “I can’t believe the day went so fast.”

“It’s supposed to when you’re having fun.”

Which he really had. “Not my preferred activities for the day, but I did enjoy it. Fighting and all.” Maybe there was something to be said for getting to know a person first. Leaning in, he gave Kieran a brief but lingering kiss. “Thank you.”

He unlocked his stateroom door and went inside, leaning back against the door to close it. Frustrating as it all was, part of him was proud of the fact that he could play this game and not press the issue beyond what Kieran willingly offered. The other part was disappointed. This would be the first night on one of these trips that he had returned to his cabin alone. Did that mean he would spend the prime hours of the night sleeping?

“Chris, you’re pathetic.”

The knock on his door made him jump out of his skin.

Kieran stood expectantly on the other side. “I think I’m beginning to see why you avoid the whole dating thing.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You kiss me and leave me standing there, not even giving me a chance to respond.”

“I thought—” Chris tried to read Kieran’s expression. “You’re trying to make me crazy again, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m inviting you over for a drink. Anything else is all in your imagination.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.” That didn’t keep him from following Kieran next door. “Just so I’m clear. A drink...and maybe more?”

“Maybe. You’re catching on.”

Taking a chance, Chris settled his hands on Kieran’s waist. “Does this maybe more involve getting me so drunk I don’t remember what happened in the morning?”

“You’ll have to take a chance and find out.”

“All right, but if I can’t find my pants in the morning, I’m blaming you.”

Kieran followed him in with a chuckle.

The laughter stopped when Kieran caught Chris’ arm and pushed him up against the bulkhead, pressing into him firmly but without aggression. “On second thought, maybe we don’t need those drinks.”

Chris held onto Kieran. “If this is another one of your games—” The kiss effectively shut him up. Subtle as everything else Kieran did, but with an underlying intensity that convinced Chris more than anything else.

Kieran pulled back. “Convinced?” he asked as if reading Chris’ mind.

“I’m getting there.”

Kieran did some more convincing, slow and firm, passionate without being demanding. Chris followed each

teasing lead of his tongue, not surprised to find his arms wrapped around Kieran the next time they came up for breath.

“I love the way you kiss,” Kieran said, breathless, lips never quite leaving Chris’.

“Funny, I was thinking the same thing.”

“You know this whole game almost killed me. After last night, all I could think about was your gorgeous mouth.”

It relieved Chris more than he cared to admit to find out that the feeling was most definitely mutual, as was the frustration. “Then why keep playing?”

“I wanted to be sure I had your full attention. I’m not one of those boys who’s satisfied with a quick roll in the sheets.”

“So how long does it take you? I like to be prepared.”

“The next three days will be a good start.”

“Sounds promising.”

Kieran leaned in but evaded Chris’ attempts to initiate another kiss, his breath dancing over Chris’ ear. “I can also promise that a year might almost be enough time for you to recover from it.”

Chris grinned but shook his head. “I don’t know. I still think you might be all talk. You’re going to have to prove it.”

“My pleasure.” Once again he kissed Chris in that easygoing way he had, in no hurry to escalate things.

Relaxing, Chris skimmed his palms down Kieran’s back, the high-quality cotton of Kieran’s t-shirt like satin. He could feel the gradual flex of each muscle as Kieran made minor adjustments in his positioning. Chris was usually so focused on fulfilling his immediate needs on these trips that he never took the time to appreciate his partner beyond fleeting surface impressions.

“It’s good, isn’t it? Taking the time to get to know each other.”

Chris lingered over Kieran’s mouth again before asking, “How do you do that?”

“Hm?” Kieran seemed more interested in the exploration of his hands.

“How do you always know what I’m thinking?”

“I took the time to get to know you, Christopher. I watched you and I touched you and I talked to you. Do you think any of them will even think about you after this trip?”

Flattering though it was to thinking himself unforgettable, Chris was still realistic about things. “But you will?”

“Oh yes.”

Chris sure as hell wouldn’t forget Kieran. “I’m glad you made me wait.”

“You chose to wait.” Taking a step back, Kieran caught at the hem of Chris’ shirt and slowly worked it up. “I haven’t made you do anything. Yet.”

Chris returned the favor, revealing that barrel chest he so admired. Once off, the shirt became the perfect harness to draw Kieran against him again, this time for the electric pleasure of skin on skin. “If I chose to wait, it’s because you made it too appealing not to.” He darted his tongue along the crease of Kieran’s lips, earning him a very satisfactory shudder. “I didn’t want sex. That I can obviously get anywhere. I wanted you.”

“I needed you to be sure of that.”

“Oh, I’m very sure.” He lost himself again in Kieran’s kiss, mapping out the firm muscles of his back. When Kieran pulled back to lip along the underside of Chris’ jaw, he took a chance to ask, “Are we going to do this here against the wall?”

Kieran glanced up, his lips never leaving Chris’ skin. “Do you have a problem with that?”

“Not at all. Some of my favorite experiences have been against a wall. But after all the work you put into getting me here, it seems like a waste.”

Kieran’s mouth shaped a smile against Chris’ throat. “What did you have in mind?”

“Well, there’s a great big bed right over there.”

“A bed? How pedantic.”

“I’ll fuck you over the back of the couch later to make up for it.”

“Mm, I might be up for that.” Kieran grazed his teeth along Chris’ collarbone. “So long as I get to fuck you in that great...big...bed.”

Chris shivered. “I don’t think I want anything more.”

“I like a man who’s flexible.”

“If my partner’s experienced, I’m up for pretty much everything.”

Kieran chuckled. “Another reason why you shouldn’t be wasting your time with the young crowd.”

Chris used their embrace to move away from the wall towards the bed. He wasn’t in a hurry, but he definitely wanted to keep things moving forward. “But that’s why I do. Most men our age are too set in their ways. They know what they like and they want it that way, regardless of what you want. Younger men are more malleable. If they’re confident enough to be on a trip like this, they’re willing to try anything.”

“Including fucking an old guy?”

“Watch it. Besides,” it was his turn to tease at Kieran’s ear, “they love it when I fuck them. They can’t get enough of me.”

“At least there’s nothing wrong with your ego.” Kieran tumbled them onto the bed and moved astride Chris. Slipping his shirt off and tossing it aside, he added, “Good I’ve got one to match.”

Chris ran his hands brazenly over Kieran’s bare chest, relishing Kieran’s weight on his balls. If it weren’t for their jeans, Kieran could just as well have been impaling himself on Chris’ cock. The thought of it was enough to make Chris roll his hips.

Kieran rose up on his knees. “Slow down, tiger, we’ll get there.” Bending down, he began caressing Chris’ chest with his

mouth, leaving Chris to admire the short brush of his blond hair.

Chris fingered through Kieran's hair, finding it every bit as soft and thick as it appeared.

Kieran descended further, pausing to tongue at Chris' navel, a spot that turned out to be surprisingly sensitive. His neck was always a good bet, hip too, but the navel...that was new.

"You like that a lot," Kieran observed as he worked open Chris' pants.

"Must be the partner."

"Must be." Rather than continue as Chris had expected, Kieran rose up again to undo his own jeans, exposing a thick patch of curls and the tip of his erection. When he covered Chris' body for another kiss, Chris groaned aloud at the intimate contact of their stomachs, sensitive in their own right but promising so much more.

Kieran settled on the bed next to him. "Go ahead and touch it." He clarified his words by reaching into Chris' pants to begin fondling him gently.

Chris reciprocated, finding Kieran hot and responsive to his touch. "This reminds me of those tentative grope-fests after school and before whoever's parents got home."

The thumb Kieran ran over the slick tip of Chris' cock was anything but tentative. "Of course you started early."

"I'm not sure late in my senior year would count as early these days."

"Early enough." Kieran kissed him again, mouth mimicking the actions of his hand.

Chris tightened his grip, experimenting with strength and pull until he knew which Kieran preferred. Kieran did the same with an expert hand that bore no similarity to those younger days.

Chris was gasping from his building orgasm when he finally asked, “Are we really going to get off like this?”

“We’re going to do whatever we want.” There was a low growl in Kieran’s voice that said he was as close as Chris was. “Now that I’ve got you in my bed, I’m not letting you out again.”

The promise in those words, combined with Kieran’s touch, pushed Chris over the edge. It might have been embarrassing if Kieran hadn’t come right after.

Something so simple shouldn’t be so intense, but with the right partner...

Kieran dropped beside him, removing his hand from Chris’ pants. Chris was more than half hard again by the time Kieran started licking his fingers clean.

“Jesus...”

Kieran laughed. “Three days, Christopher. Three whole days.”

Chapter Seven

Chris gripped the balcony railing as Kieran probed deeper with his tongue. By this point the balcony was the only place they hadn't fucked. It wasn't out of shyness or lack of desire, but more the fact that they hadn't even made it outside the room for meals. Scott the steward had looked disappointed the first time he'd brought them room service. Afterwards, Chris didn't even notice.

The cool breeze danced across his heated skin, and he gasped as Kieran added a finger to his play. "We should have done this sooner."

Kieran pulled back, his thick fingers continuing to massage where his mouth had been a moment before. "Which part? The sex or the balcony?"

"Yes."

Chuckling, Kieran got to his feet, wrapping his arms around Chris' chest and letting his cock find its own way along the now familiar route into Chris' ass. Chris hissed in pleasure and gripped the railing, heedless of the empty, moon-drenched deck below them.

"God, I'm going to miss you." Kieran's voice was hoarse and he tightened his hold a fraction.

Chris felt the same way. And here, more than any other reason he'd given Kieran, was why he'd stuck to the younger men. He didn't get attached to them. He clutched at Kieran's

arms, relaxing further into his embrace, unable to say the words.

He didn't need to. Kieran understood him better than anyone ever had. Which only made it harder. And better.

Kieran shifted the angle of penetration and drove all of it from Chris' mind in a blinding flash of ecstasy. "God, just like that."

Kieran buried his face in his neck. "Live in the moment, Christopher. This perfect, fucking amazing moment.

Chris lost himself in the feel of Kieran both inside and around him. If he spoke, it would probably wind up being something sentimental and that wasn't his style.

Craning his head around, he caught Kieran's mouth and let his actions speak for him.

Afterward, Chris led his lover back to bed, drawing him into his arms to enjoy the comforting weight of Kieran's head on his chest. They lay there quietly in each other's embrace, but neither of them seemed ready to fall asleep.

Chris was the one to break the silence at last. "So your flight home is tomorrow?"

Kieran didn't move. "Yeah. The jet lag's going to be a killer, but I pushed my schedule too hard as it is, I couldn't justify another day."

Jet lag meant time zone changes. Large time zone changes. As in west coast.

"What about you?"

"I'm staying over in Miami. Make re-entry a little easier." Except it wouldn't be now.

"Makes sense."

If Kieran hadn't already mentioned his scheduling issues, Chris would have asked him to consider pushing back his flight. "Live in the moment," he murmured.

"What was that?"

“Nothing.”

Kieran rolled over to face him. “That didn’t sound like nothing.” He ran his thumb along Chris’ jaw. “Bet you’re wishing you stuck with the fine, young one-offs.”

“Actually, I’m wishing you’d gotten through to me sooner.”

“Me, too.” Kieran kissed him, not arousing but intimate, affectionate. “Who knew you would be so stubborn?”

“My mother, for one.”

Kieran feigned horror. “You do not live with your mother.”

“No, I do not. My mother lives in Cleveland. I’m—”

Kieran covered his mouth. “Don’t. What happens on the ship stays on the ship, remember?”

“This is different.”

“I know it is, and that’s why it’s even more important. If we start learning about each other’s lives, we’re going to want to be part of each other’s lives, and we both know that can’t happen.”

“Why not?” As much as he avoided relationships and fought this one, he sure as hell didn’t want to lose Kieran over some petty reason or another.

“Are you going to give up your career, your established and apparently very successful career, to come live with me?”

Chris didn’t need to respond. The answer was obvious.

“I can’t, either. I’ve got too much time and work invested in getting where I am, the same as you have.” He lay back down on Chris’ chest, pressing into his embrace. “So we enjoy what we have while we have it.”

“You see why I stick with the younger guys?”

“I’ll remember that the next time I accidentally end up on a floating orgy.”

Chris snickered. "They really should put that in the brochure."

"Probably." He could feel Kieran's smile. "But then I never would have met you."

"True," Chris agreed but didn't say any more, just lay there memorizing the feel and smell of Kieran.

Bags in hand, they waited side by side on the main deck as the ship pulled into port.

"The real world," Kieran grumbled. "You were smart to take an extra day."

"I learned that the hard way. Nothing like having a great week and having to jump headfirst into whatever shit piled up while you were away." Not that he had to worry much with David overseeing things.

"Have you got a cab coming?"

"The hotel has a shuttle. They'll call me when they get here."

"Ah."

Kieran's cab would be waiting as soon as they rolled out the gangway.

"Yeah."

"So." Kieran never looked away from the approaching pier. "What are we doing for your next vacation?"

Chris grinned. Living vacation to vacation beat never again. Next time held promise. He could do next time. "Christmas in Cancun?"

Kieran wrapped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him close. "I'll meet you there."

About the Author

Under their individual guises, Philippa Grey-Gerou (India) and Emery Sanborne (Harper) have been writing together for about five years, two of those professionally, and finally decided that since they share a brain, sharing a name only makes sense. As their co-written stories tend to be a little darker and have a slightly harder edge than our solo words, the separate identity comes in handy. The fact that they don't have to worry about who gets top billing doesn't hurt either. Plus, no confusion on where to shelve them! Their stories under the name India Harper have a slightly harder edge as they explore predominately male/male relationships in the rich environments of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Emery lives in Philadelphia with her cat, while Grey lives in the Philadelphia suburbs with a less well behaved zoo.

You can find out more at their website:
www.indiaharper.com.

Also by This Author

Creatures of Sin Series

Sins of Arrogance, Amber Quill Press

Sins of Omission, Amber Quill Press

Single Titles

Hearts Afire November, Liquid Silver Books