

# DEEPEST OCEAN GREEN

## BY JLNICKY

### Disclaimer:

1. **Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Some, reflected in memories, of a past rape.
3. **Sexual content:** Ummm, No. This is PART 1. I had a deadline and I did not get to complete the entire story. So the desired sexual content is not included yet. Although a lot of prepping is happening. You know...attraction, heavy breathing. And its between two women. Imaging that! Yes I can! :)
4. **Special thanks:** to my younger sister for kind of prodding me onward. I got writers block a few times cause I didn't have any Oreos.
5. **Language:** Not yet. Lol!

### Deepest Ocean Green Part 1

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship – From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island, and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

As if on a dare, the boats attempted to maneuver out of the small launch way! The weather insisted on disobeying the rules of 'lazy sailing' as the few captains brave enough, one after another, fought against the rough currents of the ocean.

A solitary building holding court next to the pier and boat ramp flashed a gaudy neon sign, Restaurant Bar and Grill. Its roof was covered with hundreds of small nests made by the local Floridian waterfowl. The building's 10-foot tall plate glass window reflected the nearby water, boats, and sky. The window ran the entire length of the building. Its frame was still circled by Christmas lights dangling in half loops from the edge of the rafters.

More than one glance and mumbled curse carried into the wind as the periodic wafting of cooking bacon and other breakfast smells drifted over the few boating enthusiasts performing last minute checks on supplies and gear. A man's weakness was his stomach, so the experts stated.

Her generous lips unconsciously curved into a half smile as Dean Tanner leaned forward resting her elbows on the table where she sat. Looking out the window, she admired the nearby sails that shimmered with the wind. Her broad shoulders were rigid with tension. She watched the struggling sailboats motor out against the wind-swept water onto the gorgeous Lake Apopka. Behind sunglasses, her

dark blue eyes swept the deserted sailboat shipyard from end to end. She sat back with a sigh, sipping the hot cup of coffee in her hands. An unknown restlessness urged her to glance upward at the overcast skies. Not finding the source of her unease, she stared again at the sailboats dotting the open waters. The weather was a bit too brisk for smooth sailing.

She mentally frowned, trying to remember the last time she had been able to sail her own vessel. Rough seas, or gentle, she knew her heart longed for a few moments of open waters and an unknown destination. She wanted to feel that mental and physical challenge of straining to capture the wind, slicing through the water at top speeds, bending to the curve of the earth as she fought the sea.

She lowered the cup and let her long fingers rest lightly against the side of the ceramic mug. An old habit took over as she unconsciously tapped the commander's silver, Naval Academy ring on her finger in a rhythmic pattern on the surface of the cup in her hand. The metallic ding was nearly drowned out by the incessant muted surge of fresh water ebbing and flowing on the lakeshore. An occasional seagull's cry could be heard through the thick pane of tinted window in front of her eyes.

Judy glanced over at the intriguing woman sitting alone in one of her dining stations. She fought the urge to top off the woman's coffee once more. She'd already been over there twice. The picturesque view outside the large bay windows, held nothing, when compared to the dark-haired woman inside.

Aviator glasses hid the woman's eyes, but her visible features were stunning. She had thick, midnight-black hair, which hung down over her sun-darkened skin to her broad shoulders. Her exquisite dark eyebrows, full luscious lips, and high cheekbones that portrayed aristocratic nobility fit perfectly with a strong muscular build below. Her neckline was sensual and that body was gorgeous. The woman was like a portrait that drew attention just by being present.

Judy estimated that the woman must easily stand at, or close to six-feet tall. Biting her lip at the unaccustomed sensation of being attracted to her own sex, she mentally compared her husband to the stranger. Shaking her head at her husband's obvious shortcomings, she gently persuaded herself to 'take a chill pill'. That woman was beyond any doubt, way out of her league.

She was wearing a black leather jacket, covered by a dark brown cashmere turtleneck, and brown leather boot cut pants that rested over black 5-eye boots. On her wrist she wore a glittering gold watch that matched perfectly with the small gold dangling earrings of her accessories. The entire ensemble enhanced her higher level of sophistication. Her quick reflexes compounded by a decidedly sinful smile alluded to danger and made her appear mysterious. Pure sensuality. Judy shivered at the husky toned voice.

Judy flushed slightly as she remembered her body's reaction when she went to take the order.

"How may I help you?" she had asked politely.

"Just coffee please." The woman replied in a rich musical tenor. The deeply pleasant voice seemed to touch a forbidden element inside of the responsive waitress.

Judy looked up from her notepad to see a vision. She felt helpless as her pen rolled from her suddenly nervous hand. A quick movement from the woman before her snatched the pen out of the air causing Judy to gasp with internal admiration. The long fingers held the thin instrument delicately then began twirling it like a miniature baton. The tan goddess sitting there smiled showing even white teeth. The woman's eyebrow rose in question above the sunglasses as the stunned waitress let moments pass. At a slight clearing from that beautiful throat, the waitress blinked out of her staring trance. Blushing and saying nothing, Judy retrieved the dancing pen and backed up slowly running into a chair behind her. Her face became bright red as she turned to escape the low chuckling rumble following her as she moved further away from the table.

Dean, only half-amused, watched the cute redhead walk away, then turned back to the watery vista before her. Tension returned to her body causing an interruption of her thoughts. Something was definitely off kilter if a pretty face didn't gain her attention. She rechecked the skies and eyed the shore looking for the source of her unease.

Delivering the coffee restored Judy's faith in her working capabilities as she performed her task flawlessly. Twenty minutes later, while restocking the ketchup bottles lined up before her, she drew a shaky breath at her uncommon reaction. Contemplating, she understood the definition of charisma a whole lot better. She smiled slightly at the idea of topping off more than just the coffee, and then quickly, she began to plan her evening with her husband. There were only four more hours before she was off shift. She shivered with a surprised excitement she hadn't felt in a while.

Unaware of her waitress's more delicious thoughts, Dean finished her coffee and glanced at her Tag Heuer watch. She fished a money clip out and left a fiver. Standing with purpose, she grasped the edges of the leather coat and crisply pulled downward once, an old Navy habit from years of wearing a polyester Navy uniform straight from the military clothing exchange. Glancing around briefly, she noticed a few other customers quietly talking. Moving with military and economic precision, she headed straight toward the exit.

Her long confident stride took her to the side of a dark-blue SUV. She was out on Interstate 4 within minutes, heading through Orlando toward the Atlantic coast. Her uncle's ship was waiting for her to grace it with her presence.

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Chris Parker stood facing the private verandah of her stateroom aboard the luxury cruise ship, Queen Victoria. In her dress whites and first officer's rank, she leaned her five foot, four inch frame against the railing and looked down. The blur of busy figures on the lower deck did not register as she clenched and unclenched her fingers sporadically, brewing with anger.

*How could he do this to me? What a creep! How could I let myself get in this situation? Blatant ogling was one thing, but he went too far.* Her green eyes filled with tears at the helpless feelings she had endured. His strong grip and the suffocating press of his body on hers had her trembling with renewed fear. Just as suddenly anger reappeared as she relived the stray comment she had overheard one member of the crew make while she made her way up a staircase.

"Looks like Ms. 'I'm-to-busy-climbing-the-cruise-ship-ladder-Parker' is all about sleeping her way to the top." His voice deepened with sarcasm. "Heard she did it with Temple, last night." The under class crew member crudely imitated a gesture with a finger and his fist.

She fought the urge to descend the stairs and deck more than the flooring of the boat. Helpless to defend herself just yet, she had quickly retreated to her cabin.

Twenty-four hours later, she was still wiping away the tears, trying to catch them before they fell. She pushed a stray wisp of blonde hair behind her ear, frustrated with her dilemma. Crossing to the bathroom, she spritzed her hair back in place and checked her makeup. Her cheeks were pale and her eyes were unnaturally bright. Shadows of fatigue underlined her green eyes. She clenched her jaw with frustration.

Her spotless reputation of steadfast, on the ball, dedication was being obliterated by an 'under-handed weasel' of a man. *Who knew what slander that man was saying to others?*

She knew the devastating effects of the rumor, which ran amuck, and was constantly banishing the aftereffects as fast as they formed. Employee morale was one large headache of a mistress that Chris had to bow down to and keep happy. Her job demanded that she settle any issues, including rumors. How could she destroy a nasty rumor if she was the subject?

If she could only take back the huge mistake she had made of going to his stateroom alone. How is the first officer supposed to not respond, when the captain requests her presence? Even if he was only a captain in training for the cruise line, she couldn't just ignore his request. Her foot was still bruised from the kick she had given him when he tried to molest her. Going to his stateroom that night had not only turned the tides for her career, it had brought deeply buried memories up to the surface to be relived.

*No!* She silently told herself as she shivered and looked at herself in the mirror. She wouldn't return to that black spot. The childhood memory chilled her deeply. You are not that little girl anymore. She urged herself to focus.

Regardless, her mind shimmered briefly over the past and the face of the boy who had attacked her was dredged up. Portions of her battle during the rape, and dark memories of her cries for help were clearly heard in her mind as she jumped back into the traumatic episode of her long departed childhood. The reflection of her current image disappeared easily. The broken shell she had once become and fought her way back from reappeared.

He'd had his way, then left. His friends had found her in the dingy dorm room where she had lain for hours, locked deep inside herself, hiding from the event. Someone had taken her home and silently dumped her still form onto the dark porch. The enraged reaction from her father as he found her, curled up into a ball, on the front steps was not expected. He had lost it. He accused her of leading the animal on. Her modes of dress, the makeup, and the hairstyle were all culprits to help fit the crime. She found her courage for a moment in time and rebelled against the accusations.

The backbone of resistance she found inside strong enough to yell back at him had drained from her spirit when he slapped her in reply. Her already bruised body flew across the room and she had fainted. Upon waking, fear became her constant companion.

The sudden panic attacks had begun soon after. The unfamiliar feelings of shame and fear rose to overwhelm her. She eventually had a nervous breakdown at the tender age of sixteen.

The event returned, fresh to her mind. As fresh as the reflection she stared at in the mirror before her. The fractured spirit left from the earlier experience slowly dissipated from her mind as she looked into the mirror with tear-filled eyes and saw the image of what she was today.

She still remembered the feeling of being a helpless child at the time, too young to have gone through an ordeal like that. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, pushing the ugliness away.

She was stronger now, she argued mentally. She clenched her fists. Blinking away the tears, she lifted her head to stare at her reflection once more. She was thirty-four years old and a veteran of the Tanner Industries Shipping Line. She had met David Tanner and his brother Dennis many times in her fourteen-year career. They recognized her name and face. Unfortunately, she knew that they had also hired Temple. Chris wondered if he had made similar moves on other ship personnel?

She watched her hand suddenly tremble as she attempted to re-apply the mascara. Clenching her fingers in a fist, she moaned at the easy tears that reformed in her eyes. Quickly she brushed them away and blew her slightly stuffy nose.

Pinning back a few more locks of her golden hair, she touched up her make up, breathed deeply, and turned to make her way down to the officers' crew meeting.

Internally, she felt like punching someone, or something, but resisted the notion and glanced neither right, nor left as she walked the hallways. She noticed the flash of the first officer's ranking lapel pin at her neck reflecting in the elevator mirrors and straightened her shoulders with pride. The title she held had been achieved with skill and dedication, bringing her one step from the top position on the ship. She hoped that she could tune out the ugliness that had occurred. She needed to keep her head on her shoulders for this voyage.

A little voice worried loudly in her head about his vicious threats.

"I'll blacklist you for anything bigger than a row boat. You're just a little dyke wanna-be." He had groaned out after she scored heavily with her foot. He lay on the floor writhing in pain.

Falling quickly into shock at the assault, she felt an instant return of the fear that overwhelmed her from the sudden memories of the other attack. The look on her face gave the man at her feet the impression that she feared being 'outed'.

"Oh, that's what it is, huh?" his deep voice razor sharp, full of hatred, cut into her fear, making her aware of how precarious a position she was currently in. She turned and had run from the room in frightened horror, vaguely hearing what he said.

"You're into fucking women! Should have known, you frigid bitch. I'll make you pay."

Returning to her cabin, she locked the door for the night. She didn't recall sleeping very much that night. She relived the memory of the humiliating experience of her youth with her father throughout the midnight hours. His memory only strengthened her belief that the worse case scenario was yet to

come. *When will I be accused of sexual harassment? When will the tower of my career, that I have worked so hard to gain, come tumbling down around me?*

The hypersensitive state she had been in for the last twenty-four hours was wearing her down. Fear had her on the verge of hysteria and she was beginning to show the strain. The strain was so apparent she couldn't keep from tearing up at the slightest issue.

She hadn't heard anything about it yet, but nothing was sacred at sea. Look at the rumor mill already slashing away at her reputation. She knew that he had told everyone she had slept with him. However, what else had he said? *Was it my fault?* She questioned herself with doubt. *Will I be blamed?*

She made her way to the Grand Atrium and paused to take in the effects of the holiday decorations finalized by the staff members wandering around. The thirty-foot Christmas tree, standing in the circular room was a triumph of resourcefulness, which stopped her dead in her tracks. The brightly lit lights twinkled throughout the branches evoking the holiday spirit to all who paused nearby. Chris stopped and stared for long minutes, absorbing the holiday atmosphere.

Looking around, she took mental notes carefully. Everyone seemed to be in the right place, doing the right thing. She felt so tired. The ship had only one day before the guest's arrival. And a new 'unknown' captain would be joining the crew this trip and should be signing in within the hour. There was so much to do.

Chris followed a path across and under the three story tall room, the focal point of the ship's center. She ignored the dizzying effect the empty space gave her and focused on moving toward the main floor's indoor restaurant, aptly named 'The Aquarium'. The active ranking members of the crew were gathered to meet and greet the new leader.

Whether it was paranoia, or a sudden lull in everyone's conversation, the minute she stepped into the entrance, she felt a couple dozen eyes turn toward her. Ignoring the weight of the stares, she walked forward to join the group.

"Have a message for you, Top!" Hazel Wain walked over to meet her. The 'Top' reference made Chris relax from some of the tension that had been gripping her body since heading toward the gathering. Although it was common aboard ship to refer to the first officer as the top-ranking officer below the captain, only well liked 1st officers were referred to as 'TOP' on a regular basis. At least Hazel was backing her.

The shorter, slightly rounded, brunette handed Chris the folded ship to shore telegram and discreetly winked a hazel colored eye at Chris. Chris could feel more tension leaving following the friendly purser's sincere smile.

Hazel was one of many people aboard ship who had vocally shared an aversion to the Captain, Steve Temple. Chris had received numerous complaints from the crew a few hours after he stepped foot on board. His official status was to begin training under one of the cruise line captain's for eventual takeover. So far, during his tour with them, their ship that had never left docking and was soon to sail on its maiden voyage, had been greatly upset from top to bottom by a man who spent most of his time on shore. His daily lists of "demands" were given to Chris to mete out, as he would take off shore bound. Upon his return, hours later, he was without mercy if he found anything not completed.

Chris had been struggling desperately in the last seven days to hold the ship and the crew together, keeping their focus on completing all tasks prior to cast off. She had no idea what was occurring at the management level of Tanner Industries. She had only received two wires over the past week from David Tanner. One message was received the day after Temple had tried to fire three of the officer staff. A wire was sent to retain the three individuals and to continue as ordered until further notice until the captain arrived. The only other message was delivered yesterday. It was extremely short, announcing the expected arrival of the captain, who was scheduled to come aboard today.

She reread the telegram several times, trying to read more into the short one-sentence note. It read that the captain was on schedule and should arrive within the hour. The message was from D. Tanner. Chris hoped the crew was organized and in a state of mind to be able to bring the captain up to a functioning level in a short period. She prayed to God that the captain was pleasant and a fast learner. She hoped that the captain would be easy to transition into the job. This last week had been a nightmare filled with errors of ignorance from the instructions Scott had made the crew carry out. He seemed to manage to do everything wrong, every time. She realized as she reread the message her eyes were blurring from more than tears. She couldn't remember if she'd slept more than three hours a night for the last six days. Blinking to recover, she tilted her head studying the telegram a lot longer than necessary.

Her thoughts crawled in a slow spiral of fog. The lower status crew continued to gossip about her and the currently absent, Steve Temple. The upper echelon line officers on staff were currently supportive and understanding toward Chris. At least they seemed to be for the moment.

Chris folded up the telegram and glanced up into the sea of twenty, or so, faces looking at her with various expressions. Nodding briefly, with wavering confidence, she ignored any questioning eyes and stuck with the internal game

plan she'd set for herself. She would play it cool and talk with the captain when she got a chance.

"The Captain should be here any time now. Have a seat. I'll go check the boarding ramp to see if anyone has seen him. Please have your participation dossier available to turn in after the meeting. We all know we need to triple check those. Officer Rice and Officer Welham, will be in charge of leading the groups for the ship safety tours. Make sure they have your list of issues by the end of day."

Chris made an abrupt about face and headed for the atrium to cut across to the lido deck. She tried not to think of the relief she felt moving out of range of all her supposed adversaries. Her short 5'4 stride, quickened in pace as she opened the lido deck doors. She ran straight into a tall body on the other side of the door.

The collision caused a loud "oompf" to come from within the dark form in front of her. A hard thud sounded as something fell to the deck. Chris had a moment to smell leather and jasmine before two hands firmly grasped her upper arms and straightened their entwined bodies apart.

"Excuse me!" Chris apologized immediately as her eyes took in the tall body standing before her. Her gaze continued to climb to an impossible angle as she squinted into the sun shining down. The dark figure shrugged and stepped back a pace. Chris looked at the leather-clad figure as she lifted her hand to block the sun's beam. She discovered it was a tall, good looking, woman. A very tall, very good-looking woman! Chris swallowed an uneasy lump in her throat and blinked at the sudden tears making her eyes shine. *Damn tears!* She began to shake slightly. Her head was dizzy.

"Did I hurt you?" a husky voice asked tentatively. Chris shook her head side to side and looked away for a moment. Settling back down, she took a deep breath and spoke for the first time since running directly into the woman.

"The sunlight hurt my eyes," she lied quickly to the stranger. Her gaze returned to the woman and began to examine her appearance. She was dressed in casual elegance.

"We were not expecting guests until tomorrow. I can escort you back to the gangway if you would like." She watched a dark eyebrow shoot up over the edge of the sunglasses. The reflective lenses staring in her direction hid the eyes from view. The slight smirk of the lips showed amusement from the woman.

"Then who would captain the ship if I were to leave?" that husky voice asked, politely yet teasingly. Chris felt a blush rise as it dawned on her just who she had nearly mowed down.

“You’re the captain?” She felt the sarcastic accusation fly from her mouth without being able to capture and hold it in. The eyebrow arched slightly higher. Noting a slight frown appear to replace the half smile at her blundered remark, Chris shook her head to order it in shape. Becoming slightly distressed by the sudden feeling of her stomach surging upward into her throat, she attempted to correct the mistake.

“I’m s...sorry. That was...rude of me. The telegram didn’t mention...a woman.” Chris stammered out her thoughts. Listening to herself, she attempted again. “In fact the telegram didn’t mention either sex at all. Just...ummm.” Chris paused to stop her mouth and her thoughts continued to run away from her. The little voice in her head was now screaming, 'Ok, shut up Chris, right now!'

A tilt of the dark head to one side and another arched eyebrow deepened the heated flush of her cheeks and increased her desire to run. She opened her mouth twice more attempting to speak but couldn’t seem to formulate the proper words. Trying not to unravel in front of the new captain, she lamely apologized.

“Sorry! I didn’t mean to make that sound so...ummm...weird...sorry.” Suddenly standing at full attention, she thrust out her hand. “Welcome aboard.”

The tall woman looked down at her hand and back at the younger face of the woman who was trying hard to remain calm. The turbulent, green eyes were shining brightly with unshed tears. Her fatigue was evident as the small hand began to shake slightly

Dean Tanner reached up and removed her sunglasses. Her electric blue eyes met verdant green eyes blinking at the collision. A sense of déjà vu struck them both. Dean felt her breath hitch and thought *‘did the ship just move?’*

A slow perusal of the petite woman began without thought. The Captain's roaming eyes seemed to caress the tension filled body, leaving Chris feeling exposed to their invisible touch. Sapphire eyes read her soul. They traveled from her head to her feet and back up again.

Taking the smaller hand still resting between them the new captain clasped it in the warmth of her own. A trace of a faint memory struck the taller woman briefly. She remembered those emerald eyes. Blinking to clear her head, she knew she had never met this woman before. Returning to the moment, she leaned forward slightly.

“Glad to run into you, Officer...?” Chris felt the woman towering over her and felt a distinct déjà vu strike. The sensation of a fleeting memory had Chris looking carefully at the woman’s attire once again. *Shouldn’t there be armor or*

*something?* That climbing eyebrow caught Chris' attention after a breathless moment.

"Parker. Chris Parker!" she managed to say waveringly. The intense perusal over her body had made her blood warm up. The magnetic force coming from this woman was playing havoc with her responses.

Suddenly, a slight smile emerged across Dean Tanner's face. She noted the flushed features of her new first officer and the wispy strands of blonde hair uncurling from the light breeze they stood in. The petite body, standing at rigid attention before her, conflicted with the intense questioning gaze of the green eyes. Dean wondered if Chris Parker would ever be able to feel relaxed, or was this a 'boss' thing? The blonde woman showed a visible fragility. Dean could not begin to imagine what it took for Chris or anyone to be able to perform the duties of the first officer. The position was normally a trying position with endless physical and mental demands. A whispered thought ran through Dean's head *she seems so young*. An overwhelming urge to protect this woman from harm made Dean's warm smile fade slowly. *Where did that idea come from?* Dean wondered internally, bewildered by the thought.

Dean mentally shook herself to bring her thoughts back around to the situation at hand. She had always been a direct woman of action. Now was not the time to reflect on the fact that a petite bombshell would be the one person she was to be working with twenty-four, seven. Dean straightened up and assumed a more formal appearance to her first officer. Before Chris could manage to extract her hand, it was tucked against the leather-clad arm of the senior officer and they were headed back into the bowels of the ship. Having been reared among nothing but men, being gallant was second nature to Dean.

Feeling slightly lightheaded Chris simply held on and felt the strength of the taller woman's arm muscles flex as she leaned down to pick up her duffel bag and move to open the lido deck doors.

Dean led them back through the entry room and paused as they entered the gigantic atrium center. Her gaze swept upward, looking around the room to note all of the exits. She confidently turned toward the "Aquarium" and held the door open for Chris, promptly breaking the contact they had shared.

Chris managed to shake off her mild daze and preceded the new captain through the doors. She looked back over her shoulder at the tall woman and met eyes now full of amusement. Noticing the almost smug expression on the woman's face, she frowned at her.

"Don't worry, Officer Parker. I get that dazed response a lot! Especially when I run people down then politely escort them elsewhere!"

Chris arched her own blonde eyebrows at the playful tone as she pushed down the urge to blush. The twinkle from the blue eyes shone down at her, asking her to join into the humor. Chris felt an answering tug of laughter begin to well upward and managed to keep it to a grin.

“I’ll try not to block your way next time,” she murmured softly, hearing others nearby as they entered into the dining area.

“My pleasure completely, I’m sure,” she heard Dean state just as quietly. They threaded their way around some tables to join in the now standing crew of officers.

“Crew this is your new Captain...” Chris turned in sudden exasperation realizing at that moment she had not gotten the name of her superior yet.

“Dean Tanner, everyone, very nice to meet you. I’m sure you all have things to do before we ship out tomorrow, so let’s keep this short.” The commanding voice suddenly had everyone’s attention. “I’m new to the cruise line, but I’m a veteran used to running ships. You do your jobs right and we’ll get along. First Officer Parker is my voice. If she says, do it. You do it.”

Her hard gaze seemed to meet everyone in the room as her glance swept through the crowd. She noted a few strange expressions displayed by the crew, some bordering on disbelief, others in satisfaction. She took mental notes of each one but held her thoughts for another time. Narrowing her eyes toward a small group of men in the back, she seemed to grow more intimidating.

“Don’t make me have to say this twice. I will not have my crew undermining my authority, nor will they undermine those whom I put in charge. If you have an issue with how I command, file it on a report to the head office. I’m sure my uncle will enjoy reading it. Dismissed!”

With that final remark, she effectively informed everyone she was related to the owner. Chris stood in awe from the moment she had heard the woman’s name. Taking in the elegant attire and stunning good looks, she realized why she had felt so comfortable within moments of their meeting. Dean looked like a female version of her uncle. She had the same build and coloring. The only difference was the softened female characteristics making her absolutely gorgeous. Chris would never look at David Tanner the same way again. Slyly checking out the newest addition to the crew, Chris’s eyes were captured by the same twinkling blue that laughed with her a few moments ago.

The taller woman leaned closer and spoke softly, “Too harsh?”

The warm breath grazed Chris’ ear. She shivered, automatically hiding it with a shrug and a shake of her head.

“You’re the captain, Captain!” She groaned internally at her response, but ducked her head to look at her toes in embarrassment when she heard a sexy chuckle slowly roll out of Dean.

“So I’ve told you!” Dean casually waved off anyone who started toward her as she shrugged her duffel bag higher on her shoulder. She took in the petite woman at her side and grinned at the green eyes peeking upward.

“Care to show me where I’ll be bunking? I’m thinking it’s gonna be a long night, and I need to prepare.” Dean remarked as she waited to follow Chris out of the Atrium.

Chris snapped to attention and pointed toward the Atrium exit. Dean nodded, smiled and motioned for Chris to lead the way, her larger form waiting patiently. Chris felt a moment of familiarity as she blinked wide-eyed at the tall woman. Swallowing the confusion brought about by her thoughts, Chris turned quickly and led the way to upper decks.

Dean followed the crisp white uniform in front of her and managed, somehow, not to trip on anything along the way. Her eyes were busy watching the retreating backside moving erotically in front of her. *This may be a long cruise!* Dean mentally slapped herself for focusing on the smaller woman’s curved backside. *However, the view may be worth it.* She grinned slightly, enjoying her own humor.

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**Violence:** A bit...nothing over the top.

**Sexual content:** umm well...working it in...its getting there...does holding hands count?

**Special thanks:** to my younger sister for kind of prodding me onward. I got writers block a few times cause I didn’t have any Oreo's.

**Language:** No, not yet.

**Deepest Ocean Green Part 2**

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Dean dumped her single bag on the small couch and looked at the living quarters of the stateroom. Very nice, she thought. She surveyed the contents of the full bar and checked out the stereo system briefly. Sticking her head into the bedroom door that was slightly ajar, she eyed the queen-sized bed. Two small mints rested on the pillows. There was a nightstand on either side of the bed, a bookshelf with desk unit and a full-length mirror hanging on the wall. She noted the closed closet door, turned and exited the room heading back into the main living area. The balcony showed a vista of the waterways lying in wait for their ship to traverse. Her quarters were similar to a luxury hotel suite with the exception of the constant soft droning of water hitting the hull four decks beneath it. The sun was beginning to descend casting long shadows over the water lying outside. Dean noticed her First Officer moving restlessly out of the corner of her eye.

Chris stood silently, waiting for any additional requests, or comments. She found herself shifting her weight around as she tried to ease the pain in her sore foot. Dean sat down heavily in a cushioned chair and propped her feet up on a nearby ottoman.

"It'll do!" She grinned crookedly, transitioning between being wide eyed and batting her eyes with feigned innocence. She noted the serious frown coming from the smaller woman and cocked an eyebrow teasingly.

"Aren't you supposed to laugh at the Captain's jokes? Isn't that a law?" Dean inquired, her voice full of teasing. She leaned her head back, raised her arms to clasp her hands behind her head, overtly exaggerating her movements and appeared to shift more comfortably into the cushions behind her. Chris looked over at the fully content, reclined position of the Captain. Dean feigned boredom in her queen-like pose as she regarded her loyal subject. Chris had to resist the urge to smile as she was given an exaggerated, loud yawn and a quick wink. Her green eyes danced with laughter into the depths of Dean's blue. Chris was shocked at her own feelings of ease. She felt so comfortable in this woman's presence. *When was the last time that occurred with anyone?* Chris thought. She pulled back mentally and physically, straightening her stance upright. She wasn't going to be caught with her guard down.

"Only if they're funny! It's in the rule book somewhere." She tried to banter carefully and heard a warm chuckle in return.

"Gotta rewrite that thing...it's getting old." Dean said huskily.

She gestured to the nearby chair and Chris sat down tentatively. Her nerves were on overload. Chris had a lot to do, no time to do it, and could think of at least six items awaiting her attention. Mentally trying to relax each body part she wondered what the new captain wanted to discuss.

Dean took a few moments to organize her thoughts and consequently, study the First officer she would be relying on heavily over the next few weeks. The obvious signs of exhaustion were visible in her features. Dean wondered if she would ever be able to figure out what was behind the woman's poker face as she looked at her from the adjacent seat.

"We have twenty-four hours and counting to get all green flags across the board before we sail. Where is my assistant Captain? Shouldn't he have stopped in by now?"

Chris bit her lip and stayed silent as she looked around the carpet studiously. Dean raised her eyebrow in response and after waiting a minute she reclined back into her chair with a heavy sigh.

"I'll get to him later. I've seen his record and my Uncle has given me notes. You're in better shape to be pointing me in the direction I need to go anyway. Dean eyed the woman's shape and thought to herself, *Yeppers!* Trying to get a grip on her feelings, she shifted in her seat and moved the conversation into a professional mode.

"I will be relying on your input, implicitly. I'll require full support and hard work. Do you have any problems with this so far?" Her military voice was direct and confident. Chris nodded her head firmly. Dean nodded back and stood up to begin pacing, with her hands clasped behind her back as she moved back and forth across the full length of the room.

Chris discretely noted the tall form and commanding presence. She felt a slight flutter deep inside at the imagined image of Dean in her uniform. Chris quickly looked down at her hands, surprised at her thoughts. Her head rose sharply as she focused back to the questions being asked.

"...all the files. You can get them for me tonight? I will plan on having all-night and part of the morning to review and assess. OK?" Chris cleared her throat as a strong gaze pinned her in her chair.

"I'm sorry. What files?" Chris questioned hesitantly. Dean looked at her intensely, hiking a single eyebrow. Chris felt a slight warming of her cheeks. *Damn blush. I feel like a schoolgirl on my first date. Focus. Focus!* Chris demanded to her inner self.

"The employee files of all the officers. I like to know just who I'm working with. In detail." Dean continued pacing as she began to list off the other items she wanted to review; safety checklist, emergency procedures report, entertainment events calendar, current budget report, guest list, and several others. Chris mentally sorted, stacked and categorized each item as they were stated. Examining the list, she began putting mental check marks next to the completed

items. Looking up at the sudden silence, she encountered the intensity of those darkened eyes staring down at her.

“Do you need a notepad?” An amused voice asked. Chris shook her head.

“Total recall. It’s a gift.” She murmured distractedly as she continued to place check marks. Dean nodded once, looked at her with an expression of admiration and continued without a hesitation or challenge.

For the next 20 minutes, Chris listened and Dean listed. Pausing to pull a bottled water out of the small bar area, Dean broke the seal and drank a few swallows. Chris watched the motion of the tall woman’s throat muscles. She was caught staring for an instant as their gazes crossed once again. Chris looked away hurriedly. Dean’s eyes narrowed and then twinkled with repressed laughter.

“I think that about raps it up for tonight. I need your brief assessment of what the hurdles are going to be. Then we will need to address those right away.” Chris nodded and reviewed the check marks.

A knock sounded at the stateroom door. As she was already standing, Dean moved over to the door, continuing to listen as Chris gave her the skinny on the ship’s condition.

“With the list of reports you’ve requested, the only two that I haven’t had a chance to review would be the budget report and the guest list.” She noted the two dark eyebrows rising at her statement and felt the urge to grin. “The bottom line is given to each department at each morning staff briefing and Michael Green, our purser, keeps a detailed report for review. I haven’t heard of any overages yet. The guest list has been compiled, but it isn’t currently accessible online. The lower berth tickets are still on sale until the ship pulls anchor to ship out.” Dean nodded her acceptance of this news.

She turned to face Chris with a questioning gaze. “Got anything to report to me? Any problems I should know about?”

Chris heard the question, but stopped in response as the door was opened and Steve Temple stood there. She felt the blood leave her face and shivered in an instant reaction to his presence. Dean looked out at the man standing there and then briefly behind her toward Chris. Seeing the paling creature sitting rigidly in her chair caused Dean to draw in a sharp breath. She left the door and quickly crossed to her.

“Officer Parker?” Dean’s voice broke through the sudden onslaught of emotions. Chris looked into the worried blue gaze before her, while clenching her hands into fists. Digging her nails into her palms, she used the pain to help gain control over her emotions.

"I'm fine." She managed to say in a choked voice. She cleared her throat to say it again more clearly. "I'm fine. Just a little tired." Dean looked her over carefully. The tense body and clenched hands shouted, 'Stay Away'. Dean held her breath for a moment and shook her head.

"You do not look fine!" She exclaimed. Dean's mind was spinning with questions. *What the hell was going on? Is she going to faint?* Dean rose from her kneeling position in front of Chris and stepped back only to feel another presence behind her.

A blonde man in uniform, sporting Captain's bars and a semi-cool expression stood at the door looking inward. Dean noted the crisp uniform and shined shoes, slicked back hair and a stiff posture. Taking a deep breath, she eyed the woman and forced herself to relax from the scare she'd felt.

"Is Captain Tanner here? I thought David was coming himself." Temple spoke, brazenly confident in his position and demeanor.

Dean disregarded the intrusion and spoke to Chris.

"I think you need to sleep. I can take care of the two items we need to review and will see you in the morning." Dean said in dismissive manner.

Chris looked up from her inner pain and looked at Dean questioningly.

"I can't do that." She stated forcibly. "I have too many things to take care of. The ship leaves tomorrow." *Besides*, she thought, *the other officers would think what?* She broke off that train of thought and straightened her shoulders trying to get all of her defenses regrouped. Relaxing her hands, she kept them palm side down. She felt the cuts from her nails and avoided touching anything.

Dean stood back watching a poker face fall over the blonde standing before her. She walked to the bar and picked up a handful of napkins. Wetting them with some water, she brought them over to her First Officer and held them out to her. Dean stood between Chris and the door blocking the view of the inpatient captain. Chris looked up at the taller figure and then at the napkins. With a slightly trembling hand, she reached out and took the damp wipes. A single drop of blood rolled off her palm as their hands met.

Dean hissed and quickly grabbed the smaller wrist holding the palm upward. Her expression became angry for a moment and then stoic.

"What the devil do you two think you're doing here? Where is Captain Tanner? Didn't he arrive yet? Can't you do anything right, Officer Parker?" The cutting voice sliced through the air.

Dean daubed at the small cuts and placed the cool napkin across the palm, closing the hand gently. Chris felt an overwhelming urge to cry at the tenderness displayed. The cathartic touch seemed to blanket her soul for the moment. The two larger hands held hers gently. For a moment, Chris was content to be held, forgetting for a short time, the need to stay distant.

“You don’t have a choice Officer Parker. You are on release until tomorrow at eight am. You need to rest. The ship will be ready. This is not a request.” Dean told her firmly, yet quietly.

Chris looked up into the electric blue eyes and stared into the silent anger shining back. She nodded defeat and pulled her hand back. Clutching the napkin between her palms, she swallowed and lowered her gaze.

Dean stepped back to the bar and grabbed another bottled water from the fridge.

“Come in Captain Temple. Please take a seat. So sorry my Uncle couldn’t be here. I guess I’ll have to do!” Dean abruptly turned toward the man standing at the door and sharply twisted the bottle cap easily snapping the tie and spinning it off the bottle. She gracefully flung it over to the corner garbage chute and scored two points.

His eyes widened slightly then squinted as he tried to figure out just who she was.

In the mean time, Chris gathered up the flight cap, she had taken off at one point and stood to be dismissed. Dean looked over and met the shining emerald gaze. The anguish in those eyes was clearly projected. The petite woman looked completely drained. Dark shadows below and inside her expressive eyes were a testament to her exhaustion.

Steve moved into the room past Officer Parker. Chris tried to step backward from his presence, but was trapped by the couch. Ignoring her, he walked over to Dean. He stood before Dean, trying to tower over her leaning figure in an intimidating fashion. With a highly scoffing gaze he questioned Dean.

“Who are you?”

Dean looked at the aggressive posture of her assistant and with a feline grace stepped away from the wall into her assistant’s space. Her height topped his by two inches. She grinned wickedly as she stood toe to toe with him and saw him flinch. Her broad shoulders and tapered waist were clear winners in the challenge department to his thin body and out of proportion gawky body build. His uniform hid the obvious flaws of bony hips and long arms.

“I am Dean Tanner. Watch yourself, Captain. I’ll give you the benefit of a doubt since we have never met, but I already don’t like your attempt at intimidation. Are we clear on this subject?” Dean’s eyes were chips of ice as she scolded in a soft firm voice into captain Temple’s suddenly dawning face.

Temple stepped back from the woman and tried to recover the ground he had lost.

“So sorry, Captain. I thought David was coming. The telegram was from D. Tanner. Innocent mistake.” His reserved voice held no remorse as he reached up and adjusted his tie.

Dean eyed the man quietly as she decided what to do with him. She had numerous reports on his conduct and demands. She held her emotions at bay for the moment and nodded curtly. Noticing a slight movement behind him she looked around him and watched Chris Parker fidget.

“I believe you owe Officer Parker an apology for you’re uncalled for remarks, Captain?”

Steve Temple turned to look at the first officer, his expression turning much cooler. With a slight curl to his lips, he mockingly nodded to Chris.

“My mistake, Officer Parker.” He murmured as she looked anywhere, but back at him.

Dean watched the pair and immediately, her senses went on alert. Something had occurred between them and she wondered what.

In the mean time Chris made motions to leave.

“Wait Officer Parker. I have one more question. Please?” Dean asked walking over to the door. She opened it and looked over at Temple.

Captain Temple, I’ll see you in the war room at six am. We will go over the state of the ship’s engines and scheduled maintenance. We will need a full review tomorrow, don’t be late.” She motioned with a jerk of her head for him to leave. He tentatively nodded and with a fleeting glimpse at Chris, strode out of the room.

Dean shut the door and retrieved her bottled water from the counter. She eyed the beautiful creature standing across the room and sighed.

“I just wanted to say...whatever it is that has you...” Dean chose her words carefully, her voice warm and kind. “...on edge, will be dealt with when we are both in a better frame of mind. Goodnight and go rest.” Chris took a quick look

at the taller woman and noticed for the first time the presence of some fatigue. Her broad shoulders were rigid; her bright blue eyes seemed to have dimmed. Chris's perusal of her stopped when Dean turned her back to the smaller officer. For a moment, she felt a helplessness that was indescribable. An acute loss of the charismatic vitality the taller woman possessed drained away with the visible signs of fatigue. Chris released a harsh breath and headed for the door.

"Officer Parker?" Dean Tanner's voice cut through the quiet. Chris hesitated at the door. Looking back, she was caught in the powerful gaze. Dean held the moment, taking time to get her thoughts together. She was subconsciously aware of a connection with the other woman, but ignored it as she drew strength from their continued interaction.

"Sleep well." Dean mentioned warmly, hoping her tone would help Chris be more at ease. Chris Parker drew a deep breath and nodded. She turned and left the Captain's quarters silently. Dean watched the door close and rolled the cold bottle of water between her palms. Her eyes turned as dark as the deepest depths of the ocean with her inner thoughts.

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Avoiding the crew, Chris quickly made it to her cabin. Her thoughts ran rampant over her meeting with the Captain. She watched the sunlight fading on the horizon wondered what she was going to do to endure the long hours before resuming her duties. The day was almost over and the lights were beginning to flicker along the port city. She was almost too tired to be mad about the order she had been given. She crossed to the bathroom and stripped off her uniform, hanging it up to wear tomorrow. Looking into the bathroom mirror, she took note of the recurring shadows and her pale features. She washed her face with warm water and toweled it dry.

*She is so tall. Her eyes are gorgeous. Her hands are so soft...and gentle.* Chris splashed more water onto her face, her palms stinging with the warm water on their surface. She closed her eyes briefly as she suffered the sting. *What is happening to me? Am I having another breakdown? Why did I feel so comfortable with her near?* She asked herself questions as she made her way to the bed. She felt warm inside as she pictured those baby blues looking her way. She lay down on the cool, clean sheets of her bed and turned off the bedside lamp. She realized she felt much better due to the Captain's arrival. Chris didn't notice the smile that curved her lips at her thoughts. Shortly, she drifted into sleep, resting fully for the first time in a while.

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Dean shook the hand of the older gentleman as she listened easily to his English vernacular.

“Knew your Unc’ from ways back when the fleet wasn’t a fleet a’gn. He’s a great chap to work with. He loved to et those squirmy little o’sters a lot tho. Not so smart so’times.” Jim Trenkal stated with an amused twinkle in his dark brown eyes.

Her uncle’s infamous story of food poisoning was a tale told quite often at family gatherings. During a two week cruise to Mexico all he saw was the inside of his cabin and the porcelain goddess. It was comforting to hear a new outlook from one of the crew who remembered him as young and reckless.

Dean picked up the crew files she had acquired from Jim. She liked his friendly manner and healthy outlook. He seemed to be able to help with whatever needed doing. His official title of Statesman allowed for a multitude of uses. Dean had recognized his easy nature and quiet efficiency upon running into him in the maze of hallways she had been traveling while looking for the personnel office. He was checking the life jacket cabinets and counting the quantity.

“Nothing like a’vn the key’s to the ship.” He chuckled after she had introduced herself. “Feel like sitt’n in the Captain's chair?”

They had both laughed and felt at ease. Dean took his advice and wrote a note to the office clerk. She headed back to her cabin to look over the material. After ordering a light meal from room service, she spread the bios sheets out and read up on the crew, one by one.

Twenty-two officers later, she held the final folder. It was a much slimmer folder than the others were. Inside she looked at the eight by ten glossy of First Officer, Chris A. Parker. The green eyes glowed with health and vitality. It was a slightly old picture revealing a younger Parker. The blonde curls were windswept and the rosy cheeks were shining from the glare of the sunlight. Dean found pleasure looking at the picture up close. Her fingers holding the photo ran a path down one of the rosy cheeks. Flipping to the pertinent information, she noted the years of employment and the steady promotions throughout. The high-test scores for academic achievements and promotional ability seemed very similar to Dean’s own swift climb through the U.S. Navy. The personal information was scarce. No listed living relatives, no home address, just a PO Box address of the post office in Fort Lauderdale and an emergency contact number of a Ms. Virginia Stevens. Dean frowned, closing the folder slowly and let it fall onto the top of the pile.

She yawned unexpectedly. Looking at her watch, she realized it was past midnight. Straightening the folders, she stood and stretched. As she stretched, she could her vertebrae popping back into place. She moved into the bedroom

and stripped off her clothes. A quick brush of her teeth and a last minute check on her alarm, she slid naked between the cool sheets. While she drifted off to sleep, she envisioned ocean waves forming and reforming in the deep open waters. The translucent blues and greens of the waves merged, only to crash together into the fall of gravity. They spiraled down only to begin climbing again.

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Dean, who was naturally an early riser, reached over and turned off the still silent alarm. She kicked off covers and let her six-foot frame stretch. Grimacing, with a slight pain, she realigned her spine. She realized she would be sore today. Her body, impacted by the long hours of driving, was doubly sore from relentlessly hunching over the desk to review personnel records. The final straw was ending up in a strange bed. She stretched her neck to the left and right as she leaned against the sink edge brushing her teeth. Stepping into the hot shower spray, she moaned with pleasure at the hard-hitting spray against her abused muscles. Twenty minutes under the powerful heat and she began to feel normal again.

“It’s good to be the king,” she mimicked Monty Python, grinning as she grabbed the overly large bathing towel, dried her tall form and stepped out.

She crossed to the cabin door, reached out into the hall and pulled in her Navy uniform. She was quite pleased that the cleaners had returned it early. Pressed and ready, she uncovered the suit from its plastic wrapping and hung it on the closet door hook to replace the ribbons and rank insignia. Looking it over she once again felt a surge of pride deep within her. She reached out and attached the ribbon rack on her jacket breast pocket. She ran her hand lightly over the ribbons as she reflected on the memories each brought to mind. There were many good memories of her long career. She was lucky. Although retired from the Navy, she was still the Captain of a ship. She felt a spark of excitement building within her.

Shaking off ‘the kids first ice cream of the summer’ attitude, she returned to the bathroom and dumped out a small travel shaving kit gathering the few items she needed. She brushed out her dark mane and blow-dried it. A quick 15 minutes later, she was ready to get attired. Dressed and looking slightly intimidating, she glanced at her watch noting it was 0530 hours. It was time for breakfast and time to stir some nests. Grabbing the folders off the table, she headed out the door.

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Chris woke from a deep sleep to feel the six huge diesel engines turn over on the ship. She bolted upright and barely recognized her own room. Looking over at the alarm clock, she realized it was just past seven thirty am. The sun was

shining and she felt rejuvenated. Rising to her full five-foot, four inches, she stretched with her hands over her head. Rolling her shoulders and her head from side to side, she puffed out some air, blowing the curl obscuring her vision out of her way. Heading for the bathroom, she took a quick glance at her naked form and noticed the relaxed posture and clear eyes. She quirked a slight smile at herself and turned on the shower.

"Amazing what a little sleep will do for you." She said to herself as she walked past the mirror. After showering and drying off she attempted to tame her hair. The curling was unstoppable, yet she tried using the heat of the blow dryer to make it behave. With the additional use of a can of hair spray, she finally put on her uniform. While applying a touch of makeup, she regarded the bright green eyes looking back at her.

*What's going on in there? What is that sparkle you're showing? What's got you feeling so at ease this morning?* Her hand stopped mid-stream in applying her lipstick. As she daydreamed, an image of a tall, dark haired beauty, standing in a crisp, white uniform filled her eyes. The clarity of her vision had her feeling the magnetic pull of Dean's gaze and drew her closer. She blinked back to reality as her own eyes refocused into her own image staring back. Feeling a sudden blush rise, she wondered once again, why she felt such a connection to the Captain?

She left her cabin at eight a.m. and made her way toward the top most tower of the ship. In the history of cruise and fighting vessels, this small, central office had appropriately been labeled, the war room. It had eventually become the area from which all steering and visual controls were utilized while moving the ship.

The thought of Steve Temple being on board the same ship made her frown. The thought of him being so near in such a confined space made her feel ill. The only benefit of going there was that Captain Tanner would be present. Her frown disappeared at that thought.

As Chris walked into the war room, she saw Dean seated in one of the swivel chairs. Seeing the Captain sitting quietly reading a clipboard and dressed in full Naval attire was an impressive sight. Dean seemed to feel a shift in the air and lifted her head to look directly at the door. She met Chris's eyes with an uncanny precision. Her blue eyes were twinkling with good humor. Chris felt a tension leave her body that she hadn't even known was there. She smiled a half grin and walked closer.

"Everything looks great. I barely have to be here, if not for the legalities of having a Captain on board." Dean placed the clipboard on a flat mapping table. She picked up a cup of coffee and grinned at Chris while sipping.

Chris bit her inner cheek to keep from smiling, her lips quirked slightly.

“Hey? I thought smiling was in the rule book too?” Captain Tanner chided slightly with her First Officer's hesitation at smiling. Dean wanted to see Chris smile. Her sadness irritated her senses for some unknown reason. She instinctively knew, that the petite, blonde-haired woman had a natural smile that would be a beautiful sight and then she thought. *Why was she suppressing it?*

Dean decided she would make her First Officer smile before the day was over come Hell or high water. She suppressed her own smug grin as she glanced out the window at the broad channel surrounding the cruise ship.

The sparkle off the water's surface glittered for miles. In the distance, she could make out the far side of the channel, bordered by the multitude of docks, cargo ships and smaller tugboats. The skyscrapers and smaller buildings began to appear soon after and informed anyone passing by that the city was present and accounted for.

Her attention was brought back into focus as a midshipman blew the whistle, signaling to a green blinking light nearby. Dean nodded briefly.

“Excuse me, Parker.” Dean said as the communicator buzzed in the room.

Chris stepped back a pace to allow room for the Captain to reach the phone. Dean grabbed a nearby phone communicator and listened into it.

“Yes sir!” She straightened slightly with her one sided response. Chris took the time to study the Captain openly. The uniform fit perfectly, hugging her body like a second skin. Ribbons adorned the upper left side of the jacket. The insignia pinned to each epaulet at her shoulder displayed the gold oak leaf of the Navy's, Major's rank. Chris noticed the taller woman's dark hair styled in a bun above the collar. She was half listening to the one sided conversation as her eyes swept over the pristine ice cream white uniformed enchantress.

“We are on schedule. The First Officer was on the ball.”

“Yes, Parker was on the ball” Dean glanced over at the smaller woman and noticed the intense scrutiny she was under. She pursed her lips to keep from smiling. Chris didn't seem to notice, as her own gaze was much lower than the Captain's eyes.

“We take on passengers in...” Dean glanced at her watch. “Three hours.”

“Yes sir! In Miami.”

“I'll be sure and tell her, Sir.”

Chris snapped out of her haze when Dean waved to get her attention. Finally catching Chris's eyes, Dean pointed to her clipboard. Chris blushed when their eyes met. Dean grinned. Chris grabbed the clipboard and shoved it Dean's way. After handing over the clipboard, Chris turned to look outside.

"Approximately, two-thousand, Sir." Dean paused as she listened intently. One of her dark eyebrows suddenly arched upward.

"Is that so?" She asked briskly.

"No, I don't believe I will get into much more trouble than is allowed, sir." Dean chuckled as she spoke into the receiver. She smiled toward Chris.

Chris moved toward the coffee urn. The silver forty-cup coffee pot was tucked into a nearby alcove and strapped to the wall. It rested closer to the Captain's seat at the table.

Dean murmured some responses quickly and replaced the receiver into its holder. Turning she took her own slow perusal of her First Officer's uniform. Dean mentally sighed. Some things should be against the law. The trim fit of the light blue pressed pants rested just perfectly over the rounded curves of her first officer's body. A soft crème-colored blazer and crème pumps helped the entire ensemble to show a sharply designed uniform. The flight cap was tucked neatly into the thin belt at the waist. *She was very professional and damn beautiful!* Dean cleared her throat at that thought, stifling an urge to brush her fingers through that silky blonde hair.

Chris returned to hand a hot cup of Joe to her boss.

"How are you feeling today?" Dean sipped her coffee slowly.

"Much, much better. Thank you." Chris said as she quickly met Dean's blue eyes.

"My uncle asked if you would visit him in Miami. Seems he wants to talk to you about some unfinished business." Dean stated, quizzically. Her curiosity was roused. Her uncle would not elaborate. She watched Parker for a reaction to the request.

Chris reached back and grabbed the nearby arm of the Captain's seat for some physical support. She remained calm. Her face may have paled slightly, but she could blame that on nerves. She hadn't fibbed about feeling ten times better this morning. Her body had sorely needed the rest. Her mind seemed to be on track as well. She had wondered when the blow would come. Temple hadn't wasted any time reporting the incident. Chris had decided she would deal with any outcome when, or if accusations arose. Her career was too important. She only

hoped Mr. Tanner was gracious enough to let her remain employed. She trembled slightly before firming up her resolve to take what ever came her way

“I’ll make it a point to visit.” Chris stated, flatly.

Dean didn’t like the lifeless remark and frowned.

“I’ll be accompanying you if that makes a difference. He is hosting a dinner to celebrate the first voyage.” Dean smiled lightly to break any tension Chris might be having. Chris nodded thoughtfully. She gave a slight smile in return.

“Enough about him. Tell me about the ship?” Dean turned to hook the clipboard onto a nearby peg. Chris straightened attentively as she brought her focus into business mode.

“Did assistant Captain Temple give you the vitals on her? Is everything working as expected?” Chris asked a little tentatively. Dean smiled grimly in response.

“Officer Temple needed to review scheduled maintenance on the ships engine. He is currently working with Engine room specialist Dave Pillar who will explain the importance of pre-inspection duties with the good captain.”

Dean looked over at the stunned blonde and smiled wryly.

“You, my dear, were holding out on us. Your capabilities are exemplary. This ship is ready to cast off.” Dean said with obvious pleasure.

Chris nervously swallowed the lump in her throat and felt that a huge weight was lifted off her chest. She looked over at the Captain and realized how much better she felt with her aboard. She grinned at the Captain, acknowledging the compliment.

Dean felt her breath catch. She resolved to give her First Officer many more compliments, so she could see that smile more often. Chris Parker was one beautiful woman. Dean felt her heartbeat increase. Unknowingly her eyes darkened as they looked into the amused green eyes.

Chris felt the heat of Dean’s gaze and blushed once again. She tucked her head down hoping to break Dean’s stare.

“Try to make a habit of that, would you?” Dean spoke softly after clearing her throat.

Chris just gave a half grin and shrugged. She turned to put her cup back on the hook next to the pot to cover the shiver that skittered down her spine.

Dean looked down at her clipboard and then with the first hint of loss of command she questioned to Chris.

“We will start receiving passengers in a few hours so I will be...?” Dean raised her eyebrows in question. Chris smirked slightly at the implied loss of direction.

“Standing at the gangway greeting everyone.” Chris stated firmly.

Dean grimaced slightly. “Not a good idea, but I’ll give it a shot.”

Chris pondered the strange remark and shook her head. “What’s wrong with it?”

Dean looked at Chris very seriously while saying, “I have this little problem with...umm...crowds. People sometimes find me very appealing and will try anything to let me know.”

Chris looked up at the woman before her wondered what might have happened to cause such a serious expression.

Dean was a charismatic, self assured, dynamic looking woman. The uniform only enhanced that. Her dark hair, tanned features and beauty were very arresting. Chris agreed with the verdict. Dean was very appealing.

“Too appealing.” Chris muttered under her breath.

Dean lifted one eyebrow and gave a lopsided grin. Chris blushed and tried to act professional.

“There will be other officers to actually greet the passengers. You can stand back and be a,” she paused for effect, “sort of a figurehead. I’ll mention it to a few of the other officers.” Chris commented.

Dean wiggled her eyebrows and grinned.

“You will have to make an opening statement for our banquet tonight though, so I’m sure your going to get some attention.” Chris stated, looking closely at Dean for a reaction.

Dean felt a wicked streak race through her. She leaned down closer to the smaller woman and grinned. “Will you protect me?”

Chris blushed scarlet and backed up a step. Dean laughed aloud. Her deep vocals drew attention from the others working in the tower room. Chris felt the humor well up and laughed with her.

Dean's eyes sparkled as they looked at each other. The feeling of warm camaraderie was a balm to them both. The laughter slowed to chuckles and became a comfortable silence.

Chris took the moment in and tried to remember when she had felt so comfortable with another person. She couldn't remember.

Getting back to business, she reminded the Captain of their brief Officers meeting. Dean nodded and ushered Chris toward the exit door by reaching out and tucking Chris's hand into the crook of her arm. Chris felt giddy as she was gallantly steered lower into the bowels of the ship. She didn't try to retract her snared arm from the taller woman. It seemed so natural to be linked.

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1. **Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Some, reflected in memories, of a past rape.
3. **Sexual content:** umm well...working it in...its getting there...does the word kiss count?
4. **Language:** No.

**Deepest Ocean Green - part 3**

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island, and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

After a quick four minute briefing, much to the chagrin of the Officers present, Dean Tanner spent an additional twenty-minutes approaching each of them and reintroducing herself. To Chris's amusement, they seemed to all fall under the spell that the Captain projected. Chris spent a few moments with Hazel, who seemed to have a wealth of information concerning the new Captain.

"I've heard rumor she's gay." Hazel commented quietly to her friend.

Chris nodded nonchalantly at the telling rumor. It had crossed her mind in the short time since they had met, Dean seemed completely different as compared to most women and her mannerisms were very chivalrous toward women. Chris felt a twinge of something odd inside. She, herself, had never had a problem with gay people. A few members of the crew were gay, unashamed and very open about it. Privately the ratio of gay to straight within her command was close to thirty percent. A few members had not been as 'out' as others. She knew this

information first hand as many employees had come directly to her for career advice. She had also been approached by a few women over the course of her career, but had never been inclined to take them up on any of their offers. In fact, she had told more than one, that she was not 'gay'. The simple truth that Dean Tanner was gay seemed to click in her mind as being completely right for the tall Captain.

Chris, found herself feeling drawn toward the woman. She observed the Captain's courtesy and acts of simple chivalry toward people. The ease she had of firmly shaking a hand, or quickly assessing the person with a knowing look she could convey respect. There were so many more examples of her charming personality. The often-overlooked task of pulling out a chair, or providing a guiding arm to lean on, seemed to be offered with a natural elegance, never offending and often accepted by both women and men. In some influential people Chris had learned, that the driving force of their influence is to simply attain a wider influence. They would gain more respect no matter how ruthless and manipulate the facts to enable powerful controls over them. Her father had turned out to be this way. But, Dean seemed to show only a kind generosity and consideration for people around her. She was polite and charismatic too boot. These traits ultimately gained her a respectability of high honors and an even higher level of loyalty and trust from colleagues and friends. Even Hazel's gossip sounded strangely like praise. The differences between Dean and someone like Steve Temple were like comparing black and white. Chris felt drawn to her. Whether it was from curiosity, intrigue, or attraction, it really didn't strike Chris as important. The pull was strong and she was interested.

Hazel seemed to find the First Officers silence as a signal to continue her gossip.

"She is a highly decorated Naval Officer and considered a great captain in the Navy. Maybe even one of the best at her rank. Her uncle was always praising her accomplishments, when he held the shipboard parties." Hazel sipped at her own coffee as she watched the newly arrived captain banter with the crew.

Chris had usually attended the parties and left early. In the habit of rising early, she usually went to bed early in the evening. She did remember a few toasts, which were made in the past. *Hadn't there been one about Dean receiving the Purple Heart?* It was extremely interesting to have a person to associate the tales to now. She nodded.

"She is supposed to be taking over for her uncle. She's the only child between the four brothers. Two of the uncles have already passed on. Both of them were killed. One died in a boating accident and the other in Vietnam. David and Dennis Tanner had raised her together after both of their wives had passed."

Chris frowned at the mental picture of Dean being alone as a child. It didn't fit in with the image of the confident woman she had met. A single child, raised by

only men? Dean didn't seem to have any 'single child' hang ups. She looked at her briefly from across the room.

Dean felt someone watching her and looked up to see Chris looking at her. Chris Parker looked back quizzically. Dean raised an eyebrow as if to question, did she need rescuing, but Chris shook her head. The smaller woman turned back toward the plump woman beside her.

Dean turned back to the young man talking in front of her. She smiled comfortably at his overly attentive state. He seemed to glow at her smile, taking it for approval.

Chris listened to the gossip without hesitation. She felt an urgent need to listen more attentively to learn all that she could about the Captain. Her mind had been in a fog for too long. She needed a focus. Hazel continued sharing her gossip.

"Her mother died in childbirth and her aunt died when she was around 7 years old. A car accident I think. Seems so unfair. She seems to have turned out all right though. Don't you think?" Hazel commented, not waiting for an answer. "She's a strange duck, that's for sure. She has such magnetism and appeal, and she handles it well. Hazel watched the Captain work the room.

Chris checked her watch and made a face.

"Maybe we should start making our rounds, Hazel. One hour to go before the boarding ramp is opened." Chris referred to the walkway connected to the dock and the area in which all passengers would board. She tugged at Hazel's arm.

Hazel paused before leaving to gather up the plethora of Officers and crew.

"Make sure Tiny and Pug stay near the Captain." Chris directed, choosing the two men from her available staff that seemed perfect for the bodyguard task. Although Dean seemed quite capable of protecting herself Chris wanted the added assurance. Reflectively, she somehow knew, that Dean would recognize the true sailor boy elements picked out as her companions. Dean would know instantly, that the men had grown up sailing the seas since childhood. Tiny, who was anything but tiny, had been everything from a scullery boy to a roughneck for the fishing industry before tiring from the competition between fishing zones. Pug, his best friend, had at one time been his enemy, the spoiled son of a fishing line owner. Pug had challenged Tiny, the man he now called his brother to a sailors duel. This very nasty, busted bottle cutting edge, drunken brawl, walk the plank, type of fight, took place for an offensive stray remark Pug had heard Tiny make at the pub. The two had shared their blood that night and became fast friends in the following aftermath. People tended to regard the pair as an eye catcher beyond anything else around them. Tiny, being 280 and 6'4 with his brother being 160 at 5'8 and both having a matching facial scar on opposite

cheeks that made them bookends. They stuck together like glue in a tight spot. Chris smiled as she hopefully avoided any problems with her clever arrangement. *She has a slight tendency to attract attention. Lets see how that takes care of the problem!* Chris mentally checked the whole thing off as a done deal.

Hazel winked knowingly in acknowledgement.

“Consider it done. Wouldn’t want the new boss to be swamped with good will, eh?” She chuckled lightly. Chris nodded and gave a slight grin.

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Hazel was good as gold, keeping her word. The hour came and went. Passengers of every shape and size began to board. Tiny, a mountain of a man and Pug, his shorter, yet stocky shipmate, stood between the gallery of Officers greeting the passengers and the Captain. Dean stood back watching the procession with amusement. Her, now shaded eyes, surveyed everything from behind her dark sunglasses. She watched as single adults in large groups, smaller family groups and paired couples boarded the vessel slowly. The dock looked like a small disaster area as people gathered to wish the travelers a safe journey.

Dean watched the sober, the drunk and the disorderly, with fascination. A wedding couple drank a bubbling over bottle of champagne while being seen off by the entire wedding party. A group of college kids, cheered two football players on as they passed a football between them and mockingly tackled other members of their invisible team. Family groups gathered, loaded with tons of luggage to carry toward the ship, while trying to keep the children from straying too far from them. Once these people hit the long line of other passengers hiking up the ramp, they were forced to slow down to a crawl. The line was held to an even slower pace as a freelance photographer snapped pictures under the ship's logo for anyone that wanted souvenirs of their trip.

As the passengers crested the forty-foot ramp and entered the greeting area, they met the small group of Officers that would be running the ship. Once welcomed aboard, they were handed a welcome bag with goodies. Guide maps, event calendars and party streamers were among the inventory. A group of twenty, or so, were rounded up every fifteen minutes and led on a brief deck tour. They were instructed on the safety procedures and emergency shelters.

Dean lost focus of the activities of the crew until she noted a shining blonde head of hair moving throughout. She instinctively knew that it was First Officer Parker. Slight in stature, Dean could only see her crown of blonde hair shining with the sunlight’s rays. Other officers and crew alike turned to her with pressing questions while seeking quick, efficient answers. Dean smiled at the impressive

supervision and commanding resolution as the blonde tornado moved everything along, sweeping the deck with authority.

The process was efficient, but timely. The last leg of passengers was climbing up the walkway, when the upward surge caused an avalanche. Dean, who was standing back and slightly above the crowd, noticed sudden congestion as something on the walkway, hidden from her view, managed to occur. Jumping down from her perch, she grabbed Tiny and pushed him toward the bottleneck. Voices were beginning to raise in alarm when Tiny began pushing people aside.

Dean heard a loud slapping noise, then gasps of surprise from some of the people. She entered the center of trouble as people backed away from the source of the problem. A tall woman held a man pinned precariously along the side of the walkway, tilting him over the rail. Dean looked at the nearest passengers and noted a strawberry blonde woman near the grappling man and woman. She was looking through her purse rapidly. Grasping onto her leg was a small girl who looked to be approximately, five, or six years of age. Glancing at the persons involved in the disturbance, Dean noted that the child looked exactly like a young replica of the woman holding the man over the rail. Luggage lay jumbled along the walkway.

Dean interpreted the scenario immediately. She was looking at a case of pick pocketing. Clearing her throat, she motioned Tiny to gather up the luggage. He began to direct other passengers around the tangled mess. The line began to move again.

“Would you like some help here, ladies?” Her presence was a calming influence over the dramatically tense scene. The frantically searching woman took a moment to look up and then snapped her purse closed in anger.

Seeing a ship official in uniform she pointed to the man pinned by the other woman, making her livid accusation. “He stole my money!”

The obviously scared little girl took one look at Dean and without hesitation, ran from the side of the pointing blonde figure directly to the tall commanding officer with dark hair.

Dean instinctively reached down and scooped up the little girl. The little bundle buried her face in Dean’s neck and burst into sobs. Dean’s eyes grew round with surprise and wonder as she began to rub the young child’s back in a soothing motion. Both the ‘purse woman’ and the woman holding the ‘supposed thief’ looked over at Dean in confused astonishment at the ease in which the little girl had accepted this stranger.

Not thinking too deeply about the reaction of the child Dean walked closer to the brunette holding the prisoner and looked at the tightly held man.

“Did you steal their money?” She asked calmly, she continued rubbing the little girls back as she met his frightened gaze. The man started to shake his head, but felt an answering vicious shake from the hands holding him captive and in contact with the rail.

“Sixty feet will kill you.” Dean muttered softly. “Don’t want to see anything happen, that might be messy.” Her low voice took on the sharp edge of steel as her tone turned ice cold. The woman holding him grunted in agreement. He looked into those unforgiving eyes and began nodding his head, affirming his guilt.

“Tiny?” Dean stepped back quickly with her precious cargo. She nudged her head toward the small thief as she spoke to the nearby sailor. His mountainous form easily grabbed the smaller man and lifted him back onto the walkway. The woman who’d been holding him pinned reluctantly let him go.

“Search his pockets and take him down to the ground.” Dean noticed a cop car with lights flashing pulling up to the bottom of the ramp. She looked upward for a moment and caught a slight grin from Parker waiting above. The warm bundle clinging to her chest like a second skin began to whimper.

“Shhhhh, princess! It’s OK!” Dean murmured softly.

Tiny began to strip the man of his jacket and emptied out his pant pockets. When he was done, he snatched up the suspected thief and herded him down the ramp. Dean motioned to the quieter officer, Pug, to grab the women’s luggage. Tiny returned and held various items within his huge hands.

The two women examined the contents and glancing between Dean and Tiny, reached out and retrieved their items. One of the women retrieved a clip of money, a ring and a crumpled set of tickets. Tiny handed the remaining items to Dean and moved away to help Pug. Dean pocketed the remainder and returned to rubbing the little girls back.

“Sorry for any trouble you may have had. I’ll be glad to refund your tickets if you wish to remain behind to file charges. If you want to continue, a written statement from you both will be sent to the station and the arresting officer can witness for you. The thief will be charged with robbery.” Dean informed the two women watching her. Their gazes locked and they both nodded their head in an affirmative manner.

“It’s been eighteen months since we’ve been planning this vacation and waiting to board. We are not about to be left behind.” The brown-haired woman remarked as she stared at her companion beside her. Their features eased and softened as they looked at one another.

“We just want to get on board.” The blonde replied with some residual anger in her voice.

Dean nodded and looked upward to the last of the passengers being greeted at the top of the ramp.

“Welcome aboard. Let’s get you settled and we can fill out the paperwork afterward.” Dean replied as she turned to walk back up the ramp.

Dean lightly tapped the tiny shoulder blades of the small child who was clinging to her. A cherubic face peered up at her; the tear filled pair of innocent, trusting, dark eyes lifted into view.

“Would you like to see the ship?” Dean inquired, smiling at the tear-streaked face. She was sure the munchkin was feeling better as she noted a small smile form on the bow shaped mouth. The little girl nodded shyly.

Dean stooped low and let the girl’s feet find the walkway. A small hand grabbed her own as she stood back up. The two of them shared a smile before turning back to head up the ramp.

The two women stared in amazement at the forming relationship between the child and the officer, making Dean slightly uncomfortable as she fidgeted with her coat jacket. The attention was nerve wracking, since she didn’t understand what the big deal was? Glancing down at the little girl, Dean began to instantly relax once again. Those dark innocent eyes looking up at her were unguarded and full of trust. How could that be bad? Dean just smiled down and patted the little hand in hers.

Dean swept her free arm out in front of her, giving leeway for the women to move up the ramp in front of her. At the top of the ramp, Chris stood watching. She smiled at the two women and grinned teasingly at the Captain, who was escorting a small child at her side.

“Is everyone all right?” Chris inquired, sending a silent message through eye contact, trying to see if Dean needed additional assistance. Dean raised an eyebrow and shook her head slightly.

“Seems to be all right now. We will need to fill out a report for the police. Pug can take it down to the station. Right now, these good women need to be settled into their cabin. Do we have their new accommodations?”

Chris nodded at the implied request. She took the set of tickets and replaced them with a new set. The women looked at Chris questioningly.

“On behalf of Captain Tanner and the crew we would like to welcome you aboard our ship. For any unpleasant experiences thus far, we are upgrading your accommodations to the First Class cabins. It’s the least we can do.” She stated warmly to the two women. They looked at each other then back at Chris. A huge grin covered the face of the brown-haired woman. The blonde looked stunned.

“Thanks so very much!” The brunette shook Chris’s hand strongly. Chris smiled in amusement as Dean started to move the small child toward the two women. The child resisted.

The blonde looked over at Dean and back to Chris.

“Is there somewhere we can fill out a compliment card? I want to commend the efforts of this Officer to the Captain. Chris chuckled. Dean smiled slightly.

“That won’t be necessary, ladies. All of our crew is highly trained for emergencies. The Captain is fully aware of what occurred today.” Chris remarked. Dean continued smiling and nodded.

“Where is the Captain? I want to tell him personally.” The blonde insisted. Chris reached over and turned the blonde woman slightly to face Dean. Dean laughed. The blonde woman looked confused for a moment and then caught sight of the rank insignia on Dean’s shoulders.

“Crap! I’m gonna get kicked off before I even get to see my cabin.” The blonde muttered to the brunette. The brunette, having understood the moment the blonde was turned, began to laugh.

“Well at least we won’t get lost on the water. The Captain can and will use her right to stop and ask for directions,” the brunette commented which made Dean laugh harder. The blonde jabbed the brunette in the side with her elbow and then leaned down to the little girl’s height.

“Honey would you stop hanging on the Captain and let me give you a big hug?” The little girl looked up at Dean and grinned. She slipped from Dean’s hand to run to the blonde. She was scooped up in a tight squeeze and began giggling from the kisses she received.

Dean moved closer to Chris, watching with fascination how the adult-child interaction happened. The brunette stuck out her hand toward Dean.

“Captain Tanner, nice to meet you. My name is Brooke Adams and this is Georgia Stile and our daughter Brandy.” Dean shook her hand.

“This is my First Officer Chris Parker, who will be responsible for giving me directions, if and when, I need any.” She motioned to Chris. Chris rolled her eyes at Dean and shook Brooke’s hand.

Brooke rubbed her hand down Brandy’s back once more, and then pulled the two girls a little closer.

“I’ll fill out that statement for you as soon as we get settled in.” Her voice rose again on the beginnings of an angry note. Georgia reached out and wrapped her arm around Brooke’s waist, trying to soothe her by her touch alone. Brooke visibly calmed at the touch and went back to rubbing across Brandy’s back.

“Brandy, honey. Tell the Captain thank you. Would you?” Brooke prompted the small girl. From the crook of Georgia’s neckline, Brandy looked over at Dean and smiled.

“Tt...th...thanks, Ca...Ca...Captain!” She stuttered. Dean’s face broke into a huge smile.

“You’re welcome sailor. Call me if you need any help with anything. Got it?” Dean reached out and tucked a curling hair behind Brandy’s ear. Brandy nodded, and then hid her face into Georgia’s neck again.

The adults chuckled at the shy move. Moving back to a more professional level, Chris broke the warm moment, stating she would have one of the midshipmen guide them to their cabin. She motioned a nearby sailor over and gave him the room number. He nodded and gestured for them to follow him. Dean followed their progress until she could no longer see them. She turned toward Chris, excusing herself, with a bright smile. She had a ship to guide through the channels if they were to ever leave port. True to form, they were underway within the half hour.

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Captain Tanner cleared the channels, through the port officials on the radio. Once the ship slid into the waters of Cape Canaveral, it sat in traffic for an hour before heading out to deeper water. They would be cruising in Atlantic waters for the day and making the southern trip down to Miami during that time. By car, this would have been accomplished within hours. By cruise ship it would take twenty-four hours, although the ship was by no means slow. The idea was to standardize the crew into working together efficiently and let the passengers become accustomed to the deeper oceanic swells the ship would be going through. The winding path southward would actually be more of a triangle, heading farther east, then back to land at a southwestern port. Additionally, they would avoid the heavy tourist traffic along Florida’s coastline with this maneuver.

Boats of various sizes for tourism, fishing, sailing, and water sports ran the entire length of the beaches as they headed out.

Captain Tanner began bypassing the water jungle to head into the Atlantic region, where smaller ships would be unable to safely go. The passengers were settling into the cruise festivities and becoming accustomed to the slight vibration of the engines along with the heavier beat of the water's musical tempo as the ship cut a slice through the endless blanket of darkness. The signal of separation from the channels to the open ocean became the deep low howl of the cruise ship's lonely sounding alarm system, which had to be tested prior to deep waters. The hundreds of boats and ships surrounding the lumbering mastodon replied to the deep horn with varied 'toots' of their own as it passed. The air was filled with an orchestra of horns. Add in the hundreds of birds, harbor bells, and the noise of the water itself, an abundance of life could be heard for many miles.

Traveling two more hours and then clearing through the port inspection, they were finally underway. They passed the deep-water markers and headed out to sea. Dean excused herself to the officer on duty in the tower to make her way back to the Captain's quarters with a warped sense of Star Trek running through her mind. *Warp speed Scotty*. She had one hour before the dinner banquet was to begin. She needed to be able to give a brief speech that would be followed by planned entertainment.

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The banquet hall encompassed enough tables for all the passengers. It was cavernous. A ridiculously long buffet table stretched the entire length of one wall to allow passengers to eat all night. Free food was a selling tool. The ship line had begun its tourism with gusto. Hundreds of people flooded the tables and buffet-seeking repast.

Dean met up with Parker prior to entering the hall. They walked to the Captain's table, both tired from the day's events. A few select guests were already at the table invited to dine with the Officer's crew. It varied every night. Dean smiled when she noted the figures of Brooke Adams and Georgia Stile. The tiny child sitting between them looked cute in her pink dress. Brandy was dressed for enchantment.

Dean took a moment to hold out the chair for her First Officer without thought. Chris smiled slightly and took the chair. Standing at the head of the table, Dean smiled encouragingly to the other Officers and civilians seated at the table. The lights overhead flickered, causing everyone to quiet down. Dean picked up the handheld microphone and turned it on.

“Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the Queen Victoria’s maiden voyage. Your crew, and I, Captain Dean Tanner, hope you will enjoy the next ten days as a unique experience; one that will last you through a lifetime of memories. Our schedule is posted on all the bulletin boards around the ship. The welcome guides you were given have listed the stops and shore times. Please feel welcome to ask a crewmember any questions you may have. Your ship’s First Officer, Chris Parker, will spend a few moments introducing herself and talking to you about the available resources on board. I want to wish you all a pleasant voyage. Welcome aboard!”

Dean clicked off the hand mike and handed it to Chris. She took a moment to smile around the room before taking her seat. Chris stood on cue and introduced herself. Dean listened to Chris discuss the ship’s carefully designed activities from deck to deck. She followed this with appropriate safety information concerning the medical facilities. The ship to shore schedule was pointed out to the crowd followed by the entertainment schedule for each night. The crowd clapped excitedly with the information. She found herself listening to the silky smooth, warm voice of her First Officer and found Chris’ speaking captivated her. She took a small sip of the ice water available and let a cube of ice dampen her suddenly dry mouth.

Chris ended her speech by introducing the night’s entertainment. A famous jazz singer was the main act for the cruise. This evening, she was to accompany the earlier crowd for the buffet. Not a bad trade off for being a headliner on six nights out of ten. She would begin performing from Miami and would sing each night until the ship returned to shore.

The dinner went well. Chris answered a few of the Officer’s concerns and the dinner began. The passengers introduced themselves to each other. Conversations began to flow. Dean listened and commented to some guests at her end of the table. Chris spoke in low tones to Dean at one point.

“I have no idea where Captain Temple has gone. I’ll send someone to look for him if you’d like?”

Dean smirked as she informed her First Officer of the list of duties she had given Temple. He was traversing the intricacies of the kitchen unit. He had been assigned to learn the shift details and processes of the kitchen for furthering his career as a captain. Dean explained, that she had found it fascinating, when she had been under that assignment from her Uncle. She had peeled potatoes and chopped enough onions to satisfy even Lucifer, if she was ever sent to hell.

Chris stared in bemusement as she listened to the torture Temple had been given. She wondered at the boot camp training method, but raised her eyebrows, when she realized Dean wasn’t going to give him any slack. He had surely taken enough liberty in that department prior to her arrival. Chris

managed to nod, without too much gusto and privately held back a grin of satisfaction for the schmuck who was now getting a little payback. He had worked them all like dogs, without mercy. Maybe he might learn a little more effectively, how that would feel.

After a minute she leaned over and reported the next subject on her mind. “Ms. Adams and Ms. Stile filled out the report and Pug took it into town. The thief was charged.”

Dean nodded in acknowledgment. “They wanted to thank you again.” Chris hesitated, and then continued. “They asked to speak to you privately. Brandy, their daughter, wishes to see you.”

Dean smiled warmly.

“She’s a sweetheart, huh?” Dean remarked casually.

Chris smiled back. “She’s gonna be a heartbreaker. That’s for sure.”

They grinned at each other. Dean absorbed the twinkling green eyes of her First Officer and felt a climbing attraction ignite deep within. Their innocent moment had suddenly blossomed, but into what, Dean wasn’t sure. She looked at Chris directly with a lopsided grin.

Chris recognized the strength of the moment too. Her breathing grew shallow as heat began to course through her body. A thousand vague thoughts flew through her head as the sudden revelation swept through her. She was attracted to Dean Tanner. She, who had never had a serious lover and could count her dating on one hand, was attracted to the Captain she worked under. Not just any captain either, this one was a woman. Chris bit her lip at the shiver of curiosity and fever she felt filling up her body. She wanted to reach over and touch her. *Just a simple touch of my fingers against her skin*, she thought to herself. It was a magnetic pull.

Drawing back mentally and physically, Chris wavered between ignoring the attraction and plunging into it. Fear of the unknown was not an issue. Fear of the outcome, raised its ugly head instead. She had one object that was her lifeline and her strength, her career. Steve Temple already threatened that and Dean Tanner was her boss. A significant Tanner, who was the future owner of the company she worked for. How would it look and was Dean even aware of their shared attraction. She broke their locked gaze with a soul-deprived wrench of her head. Some mistakes take a lifetime to get over, she cautioned herself lamely. She didn’t think she had any room inside for anyone more pain. At least, not until she had spoken with David Tanner and was able to say she could stand on her own.

Dean watched a myriad of expressions racing behind Chris' eyes. Their color changed from very light green to dark emerald, to forest green as Chris weighed the issues in her mind. Dean saw a withdrawal; the instant Chris stopped struggling with her thoughts. Her madly beating heart clenched briefly in disappointment as she watched Chris shy back.

Dean held her breath for a minute and tried to look at things optimistically. She didn't fully understand her own emotions right now, so how could Chris. Dean marveled at the strong attraction they shared and wondered if Chris felt the same. There was a deep connection between them that was exciting and puzzling at the same time. Or was Dean just imagining something that was not really there. Whatever Chris was holding back she was going to have to eventually explain to Dean cause Dean felt the strong barrier between them and shared the burden!

As the dinner hour came to a close, Dean found having to entertain became suffocating. She pushed her plate forward and leaned back to feel her back muscles scream. She smiled at the people and stood to excuse herself. Chris rose at the same time. Dean allowed the First Officer to precede her as they made their way around the table.

Coming to the place where Brandy sat eating her dessert, Dean reached out and touched Chris' arm.

"Wait a moment, Parker. I want to say goodnight." Chris nodded, feeling exhaustion hover nearby.

Dean neared the little girl's chair and tapped her shoulder. Brandy grinned upward. Kneeling to her height, Dean grinned back at the cherub.

"Having fun already I see." She commented toward the ice cream. Brandy nodded rapidly. "I will see you three ladies another time. Please enjoy your vacation." She encompassed the two adults with her conversation. The two women murmured goodnight as Dean cocked an ear toward the little one.

"G...G..Good...n..ni...night." Her stuttered message was clear. Dean nodded as she trickled a finger down the girl's cheek.

"Sleep tight!" Dean grinned back.

"D...don't l...l...let the b...be...bed buh...buh...bugs b...bi...bi...bite. The contorted features struggled to say the words but relaxed back into a grin as the little girl accomplished her statement.

"Exactly! No bug biting here!" Dean graced the trio with a grand smile and made her excuses.

Walking back to Chris's side they both made their way toward the Officer's wing. Walking side-by-side Dean thought of a million things to say to Chris, but remained silent. Chris remained just as quiet, her own thoughts twirling erratically.

As they neared Chris' cabin Dean stood back to allow Chris to slide the electronic card through the door lock. Chris looked nervously up into Dean's blue eyes. A tender smile and warmth radiated from the Captain as if to say, "It's OK."

"Tomorrow we dock in Miami. My uncle will be expecting us for an early evening meal. It will be casual, but elegant. Meanwhile, is everything still on track?" Dean asked, feeling comfortable with the answer of Yes.

Chris nodded and grimaced looking down at the beige carpet of the hallway. Meeting with David Tanner was not on her list of upcoming pleasantries. Tomorrow could bring revelations, she might not be able to handle.

She felt more than saw the hand rising to lift her chin. The light pressure, forced her view to climb to meet the Captain's. The ice cream white uniform seemed enormous for a moment. It towered over her smaller frame, blinding her reality into another. She shrank back in an instant of fear.

Dean, with a shocked expression, stepped back from the clearly frightened woman.

"Chris?" Dean uttered, wanting to erase the fearful gaze from the clouded eyes before her. "Are you OK?" Dean asked helplessly.

Chris's vision returned sharply to reality. Her confusion disappeared at the sound of Dean's voice saying her name. She looked up at the taller woman as tears began to leak from her eyes.

"I'm sorry. He was...he grabbed my arm...!" She said in a small voice. Dean took in the sparkling drop of wetness falling from those beautiful eyes and felt a moment of extreme anger. Her face grew glacial.

"Who?" She spoke with a deadly softness.

Chris was already regretting having spoken aloud in a moment of weakness. She felt embarrassed and shook her head to try to organize her thoughts. The coldness of Dean's response brought her into focus.

"Steve Temple. He...he threatened me." She wrapped her arms around herself to give her body comfort. Dean saw the gesture and again felt helpless. Her

anger burned higher. She reached over and pushed the unlocked door open. Lightly guiding Chris inside, she followed and shut the door behind her.

Her gaze swept over the immaculate room and returned to the smaller woman. A brief shiver ran through Chris as she sucked in a breath of calming air. Taking Chris's hands in her own she captured the tortured gaze of her First Officer.

"I didn't know, Chris." She spoke softly. Chris's hands trembled in her own. "Tell me what happened? Tell me about it." Dean murmured as she guided the smaller woman to a nearby chair.

Chris panicked at the potential of disaster she was facing. "Your uncle wants to see me? I...could lose my job?" She murmured with a release of breath. Dean rubbed her thumbs over the small hands she held.

"He would have told me. You wouldn't be serving as First Officer. Think about it, Chris. He never asked me to relieve you. I have that authority." Dean tried desperately to convince the smaller woman to realize her mistaken thoughts.

Chris looked up and away. She let the comments slip into her consciousness and felt the strength of the words flow over her. She didn't want to be afraid. The warm hands holding hers tightened to encourage her to relax.

Dean felt the smaller woman tense then try to relax. Word by word Chris stuttered out her own rendition of what had happened that night. It was cathartic to finally say aloud the incident that occurred.

Dean held the small hands listening to the event and supporting the woman in anyway she could with her soothing voice and soft touch. She truly wanted to hold Chris, but realized it was too early for that. Instead, she rubbed the skin she held and felt an answering squeeze as Chris responded. As silence descended, Dean looked up from her hands reverently.

They caught each other's stare and time stopped.

"You're beautiful." Chris spoke her thoughts aloud. Dean had been told this before, but the instant Chris said it, she felt it held a deeper meaning. Her soul shivered as a breeze of arousal blew through her body.

She hesitated to move hoping the moment would go on and not wanting to break the spell. She didn't have to. Chris stood and pulled Dean upward. Within a split second Chris took that tiny step into Dean's space. She lifted Dean's hands up higher with her own, pulling them to be cradled in her own.

"I have never felt...this way" Chris paused, searching to explain.

Dean took a chance as she lifted Chris's hands higher and gently kissed the small fingers.

Chris drew in a sharp breath in response. The magnetic pull was back in force. The jumbled thoughts in her head were swept away as she watched the sensuous lips touching her skin. The soft warmth of Dean's breath caressed her hands. She felt a tug of arousal rush through her.

"I'm..." Chris muttered, slightly dazed.

"Shhhh." Dean whispered as she lowered her mouth toward Chris's lips. "Me too!" She breathed as they kissed.

The touch of their lips melted any resistance either held. The heat of an electric shock radiated inward sharply through their bodies. It flew from the soft contact of their lips to pass rapidly through the women. They dropped their hands while seeking to wrap their arms closer around one another.

Chris grabbed blindly at the jacket lapels of the taller woman's uniform and held on for the ride. Dean slid her hands upward to lightly grasp Chris's upper arms. Her fingers clenched slightly as she heard a soft moan.

Lips parted. Dean felt her mind swim in a pleased fantasy turned to reality as their tongues met. Eyes closed, sensations grew, movement slowed as they melted together.

Chris whimpered with need as she felt Dean's tongue lather her own in an intimate dance. Their breath mingled exchanging oxygen and then evaporating into the wet heat as they tasted and explored. Dean felt a low growl escape her mouth at the overwhelming sensations she was feeling. The pleasure of capturing the prey was almost indescribable.

They needed to breathe. Dean broke the kiss with regret. Their unfulfilled desire showed on each other's flushed face as they stared at one another in hunger. Chris was the first to disengage from the embrace.

She stepped back. Dean released her and looked at the smaller woman with passion in her gaze Chris felt her nipples tighten in response. Neither moved, yet their eyes spoke volumes. Chris drew gulps of air into her mouth. Her chest heaved with the denied fuel. Dean's nostrils flared as she sucked in her own air. Her hands clenched and unclenched at her sides. Her rigid frame relayed all her unsatisfied wants and needs.

A moment of quiet found them both. They understood it was just a respite from the beginning of much more. Dean managed to relax and smile.

Chris looked at the beautiful creature before her and let the balm of the returned attraction wash away any fears and doubts she might have had. She wanted so much more, but wasn't ready tonight and didn't really know what to do. Too much unfinished business pressed down upon her, making it hard for her to think. She knew Dean understood some of what she was feeling when she watched the taller woman touch her own lips and blow a kiss at her from five feet away.

Dean turned to leave the cabin and heard the whispered words as she touched the door.

"See you tomorrow!" Chris used her words, soft and pleading.

Dean turned to take in the appearance of the petite blonde. Her hair was unruly and circled her head like a halo. Her green eyes darkened with emerald fire. Her dark lips were swollen, passion inflamed. She closed her eyes to burn the image into her mind forever.

"I will be here for you." Dean answered trying to convey in her tone the depth of her growing emotions. She met the fragile smile with her own dazzling grin. She closed the door behind her and standing in the hallway, pictured the deep ocean green of those soft eyes, staring lovingly back at her.

Her smile turned to grimness as she headed back out into the ship's outer walkway. She went to go locate Tiny and Pug and then make a stop looking into one 'Captain Steve Temple'. His future was about to change.

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**Disclaimer:**

1. **Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 by JLNicky All Rights Reserved Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Some, reflected in memories, of a past rape.
3. **Sexual content:** Ummm, heavy petting? Or groping...however you look at it, it's heavy.
4. **Special thanks:** to my younger sister for kind of prodding me onward. I got writers block a few times cause I didn't have any Oreos.
5. **Language:** Yes!

**Deepest Ocean Green - Part 4**

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island, and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

The second official day of the cruise dawned bright and sunny. The ship was alongside the Miami Port's, Riverside dock. Dean had been up at four am to ensure a safe arrival. The Miami port authority had previously cleared a one day permit to stay. It was the perfect weather day for the passengers to go and explore.

The city was well known for it's hot climate, white sandy beaches, famous museums of art and of course, shopping. Two separate cultures existed. The antiquity of an older generation from as early as the depression migrations was apparent with the world famous art Deco District of South Beach. The modern coastal front, that grew from the 60's and 80's, influx of refugees was ultra urban on the North Beach district.

Home to over 20 famous museums, Miami boasted various art collectives such as the modern art of Bass Museum and performing art of Jackie Gleason Theater, along with public art and botanical gardens throughout the city walkways.

Fabulous restaurants hosted international agendas from flavors of Argentina to West Indian dishes and in between. You could choose fast food of burgers, or pizza at a bistro café, catering to the fun and trendy, or wine and dine formally in the cultures of Asia, Latino, Greek, Japanese, or French. The choices were limitless.

Music and sports were the pulse of the city. Tourists enjoyed symphony to disco, Irish pub to cabaret, lunch, or dinner, without entertainment of some fashion was unheard of. Tennis, golf, football and ice-skating ranked among the top interests of the sport's fans. From the Orange Bowl arena to the Crandon Park Golf Course, people flocked in the hundreds to see the professional events.

The city was home to over 300,000 people, but tourism ran the numbers up into the million's. Year round fantasy weather was the common draw. Who wouldn't want to be soaking up the sun, when your northern hometown was boasting that another three inches of snow's falling? The state nickname boasted 'The Sunshine State' and bottled the collective palm tree as an infamous city sight. Street after street was lined with gently swaying palm trees, dancing to only the tune of the wind.

Dean looked out from her perch in the cruise ship's highest tower and sighed wearily after spending too many hours getting a brazen confession, out of a belligerent, Steve Temple. She'd summarily had Tiny and Pug take him ashore for the police to detain, until she had a chance to get a signed statement, pressing charges. Even if Chris would not press charges, Dean as the captain, had full rights to have him arrested for disorderly conduct and other variances of ship's protocol. Her twenty-four hour request to have him detained until her

Uncle could intervene on behalf of the cruise line was being upheld. She had called to her family and sent word.

Hours later as she passed Chris' cabin door, while returning to her own, she had remembered their shared kiss. Her dreams had been showered with warmth and heat. She slept restlessly, feeling a yearning for something that she could almost touch. She'd awoken, heart pounding, during the early predawn hours, unable to return to sleep. Her unease lingered and began to spread to her nerves. *What if Chris was having second thoughts? What if it had all been a mistake? What if...?* Dean searched her growing feelings for the petite blonde and savored the delicious sensations. *It had felt so good to hold her in my arms. More than just good,* Dean thought, as she grinned at the view of the city, seeing the skyline and noticing the colors in detail, she was enchanted and was enjoying it.

Glancing at the clock, she realized that the shift change would be in just minutes. Her mind focused on one aspect only and her body registered the excitement. First Officer Parker was due to arrive on this shift. A slight perspiration broke out on her brow. More than once her gaze swept to the door that would allow entrance to the First Officer. She managed not to hum her pleasure aloud, which would cause the other hands on deck to stare. She felt impatient.

When Chris did eventually walk through the door, Dean was involved in reading a chart one of the shipmen had brought her. She was leaning over a map table and her head was tilted down. Before the latch caught on the closing door with an audible click, Dean had stood up to her full height, commanding and regally formal. Until she met the soft green eyes looking back at her across the room, she had been prepared to believe the entire previous evening might have been a dream. The gaze she met struck at her core. She felt the subdued fires roar into a blaze. The petite blonde's smile was reserved, yet her eyes twinkled.

Dean attempted to look relaxed and tried nonchalantly crossing the small room to her first officer's side. Two steps had her at her goal and she nervously cleared her throat before speaking.

"Good morning!" She stared deep into the emerald depths, her voice low and sensual.

Chris nodded and nervously let her eyes roam over Dean from top to bottom. Her hand reached out and without hesitation, caressed Dean's arm with a light stroke of her fingers. She looked up at the captain and then realized, what she had been doing. She withdrew her fingers immediately as she turned to look out the window with a troubled gaze.

"Good morning, Captain." Chris returned the greeting, subdued. Her fingers tingled with the memory of connecting with the white material.

Dean continued trying to act casually and gestured to the coffee tank. Chris nodded affirmatively.

They drank coffee silently, their eyes roving, each taking in the other's movement.

It was a contrasting view from both sets of eyes. Dean worried at the slight frown line gracing Chris' brow. Chris argued with her inner self to relax and to not forget her position as first officer. The argument raged silently as her body took its own stand. Chris moved closer, preferring to have Dean at her side. They stood looking out of the war room windows at the view of the city line. Reluctantly, they both realized, the few minutes they were able to spend together this morning, were all they might have until the late afternoon meeting with Dean's Uncle.

Chris, who was still leery about the final outcome of any meeting with the owner, tried to ignore, the constant glances in her direction that Dean was failing to mask. It sent a strong thrill to her fragile ego, that Dean would want to regard her as a potential anything. It was a powerful aphrodisiac to have those beautiful eyes look upon her.

Dean kept looking back down at her coffee cup, trying not to allow her ardent scrutiny to disregard the situation they were in. As the ship's commander, Dean had the responsibility for the ship, crew and the passengers. The rippling affect this had on any relationship, Chris and she might share, was potentially harmful. It could be done, Dean smiled into her coffee, but possibly, not a great plan to continue working on. She knew she was going to spend time with Chris Parker. She just had to figure out if Chris wanted to spend time with her. It was a slow torture, imagining that Chris might not be as interested, or eager as she was. Every unspoken glance they shared, seemed to cause erratic heartbeats to occur. Dean wondered if she would make it through the day.

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The early part of the day passed quickly, without Chris even realizing it. She pushed her nervousness concerning the evening meeting with David Tanner into an inner recess. Being the responsible first officer was a critical need. As 'the Top' she administered control over the crew as events being held aboard ship were established.

Whether the ship was at sea, or at the dock, she was on standby 24 hours a day for any crewmember, or situation that might arise. The captain was required to hold to a standard daily 8-hour shift for safety's sake, which left the first officer to fill in the gigantic hole left over by providing support to all departments. If required, she would bring to the captain's attention, any situation necessary to ensure that the Cruise was safe. Delegation was the first key to success for any

first officer and diplomatic reasoning was the second. Chris spent the entire morning holding hands and slapping hands when required. The challenging mental and physical strength that she displayed to the crew seemed to be endless. Dean noted Chris' expertise throughout the day.

Since this was the maiden voyage for the Queen Victoria, it was doubly important to stay on top of everything. All the new crew on board, although they may have worked together at some point in their career, had not worked together on this ship. The first few weeks before shipping out, were critical in wading through the incompatibilities among the crew, which had been poorly accomplished due to Temple's interference. For some reason she hadn't seen him for practically 48 hours and she mentally thanked the Gods for that small achievement. As the day passed, Chris showed that her distinction as first officer was well earned. She already had a grasp of the incongruities between the crew and was making use of her own particular set of skills. She knew everybody's name, department and current job duties. Throughout the morning, Dean could see the bright blonde locks moving around the decks, assessing and ironing out difficulties with abandon.

The passengers were another situation altogether. Civilians seemed to understand that there was a ranking system, but anyone in uniform was subjected to their vacation needs. Chris had no shame in delivering newspapers and pillows as she moved among the few passengers sitting out in the open. A few charming smiles and light banter put the vacationers swiftly at ease.

In between checking off on the set up of buffet displays and ensuring that the maintenance crew was at work on diagnosing any potential problems in the ship's systems, Chris sipped coffee and continued along barely aware of the sun's movement until late afternoon.

Hearing a throat being cleared and a light touch of a warm hand on her arm, drew her attention. Dean smiled down at her. Chris felt an immediate inner warmth rise up from her toes to her hair, it tingled, running beneath her skin like magic. She smiled back. Dean caught her breath and cleared her throat again.

"Time to start getting ready." Her husky tones had Chris shivering as a chill ran through her. She blinked enjoying the sensation. Nodding, she glanced at her watch and felt her stomach drop. It was already 3 o'clock.

Chris felt a ball of tension return at the thought of the meeting and tried to smile at the taller woman, without showing how nervous she actually was. With Dean near, she seemed to feel the safety that she had lacked in her life. Dean watched the slight frown Parker wore and wondered what she was thinking. They walked back to their staterooms and began to dress for the meeting.

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Stepping out of her captain's quarters, Dean smoothed a stray lock of black hair back into place. A silver bracelet, fell back into the cuff of her black silk, button down blouse. The matching set of small, silver hoops in her ears glittered in the hallway lights. Readjusting the black leather jacket over the crook of her arm, she checked the 'gig line' of her leather pants and blouse. Everything seemed to be aligned properly. Dean checked her watch and caught the shining silver tip of her black boots in the periphery of her vision. She smiled. She loved these boots. The silver plated tips, matched the silver plated heels. The contrast was too enticing to pass up as she performed the dreaded shopping event. Casual, yet comfortable, was her Uncle's message. She felt comfortable enough to enjoy the evening.

Her thoughts stumbled to a halt, as Chris Parker exited her cabin room down the hall. Dean looked the smaller woman over and felt a flutter of attraction begin to spread in her gut. A slow, approving, Cheshire cat grin stretched her lips. Chris wore a light green sundress, her shoulders bare. The hallway lights reflected off of thousands of little sparkling elements embedded in the dress surface. The thin, white sandals on her small feet showed bare toes peeking out, soft pink paint on the toenail's surface. Chris' entire ensemble was crowned by her luscious blonde hair, which cascaded down around her shoulders. It contrasted brightly, with the slightly darker tan of her skin. Chris met Dean's smile with one of her own as she took in the captain's attire. Dean let the moment of dual regard happen. She was intrigued by the response that Chris was unable to deny.

Chris' eyes raked over Dean's body with a possessive intensity. She managed to shift her white sweater that she held in her hand, without dropping it. Dean was the sexiest creature alive. Their light to dark contrast was completely opposite, but somehow perfect. Dean, eyebrow raised in invitation, extended her arm and Chris took it gladly. She wrapped her two hands around Dean's forearm and was soon whisked away.

They took a cab to the doorsteps of a mansion. The gate attendant let them pass through the solidly barred entrance after releasing their names into a hand-held radio device. After exiting the car, they waited a moment to watch the cab circle back around and drive toward the only visible exit of the property. Dean, once again, guided Chris' hands back onto her sleeve and walked them up to the large mahogany doors.

The doors opened from the inside prior to their knocking. David Tanner stood inside, grinning, as he pushed back the door and ushered the pair in.

“Come in, come in.” He towered over Chris. She realized, that he barely topped Dean by an inch. She wondered if she would be in a lower atmosphere all night. The two larger people affectionately hugged and greeted each other.

“Hey-ya Uncle David.” Her Uncle matched Dean’s smile flawlessly.

“Hey there tulip!” He grinned at her rolling eyes. Both of them took a moment to look each other over and then turned, as if in unison, to look over at Chris. She gazed back, feeling slightly flustered at the twin sets of blue eyes. The resemblance between the two didn’t stop there. Chris didn’t think she had ever been in the direct gaze of David Tanner. She had attended the company parties and had even shaken hands with the man, but she had never been under his blatant regard. She felt a little overwhelmed. To have Dean, also watching, looking and focusing her potent gaze in her direction, was dually intimidating. An internal fluttering of panic began to grow in her stomach and Chris ended up, just being Chris. She blushed. The two taller figures laughed and grinned at each other as if congratulating themselves at making the small feat happen. Chris rolled her eyes playfully as Dean leaned down and murmured her wise-ass comment.

“All in a day’s work, my dear! All in a day’s work.”

David displayed a perfectly remarkable execution of Dean’s silent leading hand motion and let Dean and Chris accompany each other, ahead of him. He pointed the way further into the huge house as they wandered deeper. He wished them both welcome to his house.

Chris looked inside each of the open doors on either side, as they moved along the hallway. She’d catch a quick glimpse of the contents in the rooms; each brief glance was more fascinating than the one before it. The different decor and various ages of antiquity being displayed were delightful. Past the huge entry area, was the grand doublewide balustrade of steps leading upward, guiding people closer to the cathedral levels of rooms. David, however, led them beyond the stairs. He mentioned the dance room to Dean and she confidently guided Chris along.

As they neared a set of double doors, they heard others talking. Entering the room Chris noticed 5 other people standing around a bar area, which was set off to one side of a large room, with open floor-to-ceiling windows. The airy atmosphere was soothing to her slightly tense muscles. Dean gently guided Chris toward the people and began to introduce them.

Mr. and Mrs. Paglious were the current owners of the Miami Renaissance House, a theater stadium, which promoted various artistic events for tourism. They welcomed Dean warmly.

Mr. Talbot shook Chris' hand with both of his own as he expressed his greetings. She smiled back warmly. Dean explained his status as a hotel owner.

The others were introduced and they all began making their way to the formal dining area to begin the intricate skill of entertaining each other, while being served dish after glorious dish. Chris was lost at the amount of food while she and Mr. Talbot spoke of similarities between his hotel chain and the cruise line industry. He was a charming gentleman and made her laugh at some of his employee disasters. She chuckled as she listened, catching Dean's smiling features, when she gazed over at her near the far end of the table.

Dean sat listening to her Uncle relate a humorous fishing tale to the Paglious' on his other side. Once in a while, she would comment on the far-fetched details, he was delivering. Her gaze would often drift to the other side of the table. Chris was delightful to look upon.

A soft cough in her ear brought her attention back to her Uncle. She lifted a roll and bit into it with gusto as he smiled knowingly at her innocent look. She grinned back.

"How's the ship? Like what you're driving?"

"Steering, Uncle, steering. You drive cars. You steer ships."

"Yes, I guess. Don't change the subject. You like it don't you? The change of pace?"

Dean shrugged evasively. Her Uncle frowned and wagged his finger in her direction. Dean sighed.

"Yes, it is fine. I like the pace. It's very relaxing." She admitted carefully. "I also, have only been on the water for two days. Give me a while to get my feet wet again." She commented lightly. Her Uncle grinned sheepishly.

"Sorry. I forgot. You haven't exactly been sailing lately. How long did you have to shoulder that chain of command dry dock stuff?" David inquired.

He remembered that his niece had been deployed from a captainship at sea to landside in order to commandeer a squadron, prior to exiting the military.

"Just six months, but it was forever, if you count the lack of freedom. The old commander, who had been there for five years, was ecstatic to be reassigned, even if it was overseas. I think I was doomed from the get go. A captain without a ship."

David nodded and leaned back to signal that his plate could be taken. A couple of servants delivered the deserts shifting the diner's into the next course.

Dean leaned forward to grab a spoon, when the iced sherbet arrived. She noted Chris' enthusiasm at the short dessert. Mr. Talbot said something and Chris nodded excitedly. A small dish of sherbet was placed before her and she spooned up a mouthful quickly. Her eyes rose to meet twinkling blue. A bright, red blush covered her cheeks before a second had passed. Dean laughed at the child like antics.

"How has she been?" David spoke softly toward Dean motioning slightly toward Chris, who seemed involved with the other man to her right. Dean frowned as she dipped her spoon back into the sweet treat.

"Professionally, she is fantastic. Personally, you'd have to ask her." Dean's anger started to grow. She leaned back from the table. Giving him the look of stone intolerance, which she had developed in the service, she watched him elevate his eyebrows upward in surprise.

"Did you take care of Mr. Temple?" Dean asked, wondering what the outcome would be for that situation. She had wanted to talk with Chris about it, but couldn't add the stress to her knowing that she was already fairly strung out about tonight.

"I think we need to talk about this, Dean. Let's retire to the library." David suggested.

Dean agreed. She pushed back from the table as David made the announcement to the rest of the people. She smiled slightly toward Chris and then turned to follow her Uncle.

As they made their way out of the dining hall David turned and entered a nearby room followed by Dean. The room was well used and comfortable. Dean spared a quick glance at the beautiful woman staring down at them and then turned to confront her Uncle.

The spacious room was decorated with family portraits and lined with bookshelves that were filled with hundreds of volumes of books. The room had a lived in look and contained a huge desk at one end along with leather chairs and a small reading area near the fireplace. A life-sized picture of David's wife, held court over the fireplace mantel, that ran the entire length of one wall.

"How could you make such an error, hiring such scum as that man, Uncle? That woman could have been seriously injured." Her voice never rose with her ire. Her tone was completely granite. David recognized, the underlying temper, flaring beneath the surface. He mentally winced at his obvious error in judgment.

“I had no idea he was such a contemptible person, Dean. Believe me, if I had known how Scott Temple was treating the crew and the position, I would have cut him off long ago. A lower ranking officer turned him in for non-compliance a few weeks ago and I had to investigate it before I could do anything. I had no idea things had gotten so out of hand. He was only on that ship for a little over two weeks for goodness sake! He came highly recommended and was new to our crew.”

Dean sat down heavily into an overstuffed chair, near the desk where David had moved. She couldn't help venting to him for the anger, she had let fill her gut. “He attacked her Uncle David. He called her into his state room and attacked her.” She stated quietly, her fists clenching.

David's disgusted expression showed that he understood, the bitter feelings his niece expressed.

“Well, that son of a bitch has now been officially arrested for more than just the attack. My personal contact on board found evidence that he was gambling with the bankroll coming in from the casinos. He has multiple debts and will probably be safer in jail rather than, out of jail.

David paused and gave a small smile toward Dean. He began to explain his real reason for asking First Officer, Chris Parker to his home. “I originally asked Chris here tonight to discuss an opportunity about a promotion to captain, if she is willing to train to that level. We have another captain coming up for retirement soon and I would like to see how she would feel about the promotion. However, I now need to see if she would also, press charges against this person. His coffin is waiting and I want to give her the chance to hammer the first nail. Do you think she would be willing to sign the charges the police gave me?” David Tanner pointed to a couple of official looking documents in his inbox. He wondered how his niece would react to his news. She appeared stunned, but then began to smile.

Dean shook her head once. She had not spoken to Chris about it yet. The phone ringing interrupted them and David held up one finger to delay her answer, while he picked up the receiver.

Dean stood and walked over near the fireplace and began to pace. The fireplace was filled, with perfectly stacked, wood logs and she wondered why it was even there? Miami was perpetually hot, but the layout of the room, suggested the need for warmth. The paradox washed over her. Looking up into her Aunt's features, she felt as though she remembered them so clearly. The warmth of a distant love touched her for a moment. She wondered who Chris had grown up with and if they had been as giving. The click of the receiver being set on the cradle of the phone brought her out of her reverie.

“Finished! He’s finished!” David stated grimly. “Anything that he may have had before has now been revoked and destroyed as of this very moment. If she wants to press charges, I’ll have him sentenced by tonight.”

Dean nodded and returned to her chair.

“You’ll need to speak with her about it. I’ve heard evidence, that she was the only thing keeping that ship afloat, the entire time he was aboard. She’s a strong one.” Dean murmured the last comment, more to herself, than to her Uncle.

David stared at Dean and slowly began to smile. Dean caught his gaze and felt a slight heat on her cheeks.

“Damn.” She voiced, embarrassed.

David chuckled lightly.

“You haven’t blushed in my presence, since you were 13 and got caught watching the horses’ mate.” Dean’s blush deepened.

“I was so glad my housekeeper was here to help me out on that one.” David sighed, rolling his eyes.

Dean chuckled with him as they relived his shocked response to her intelligent questions. The housekeeper found the whole thing totally amusing as she watched David’s obviously panicked reaction to his niece’s discovery. He had brought Dean straight to her and offered the poor woman a raise if she could only explain. Patsy, the housekeeper, had stayed true to form and looked at David with rolling eyes.

“Well? What do you want me to tell her? Anything you don’t understand yet yourself?”

They heard her saying clearly in their memories of Patsy’s chat with David.

Dean, along with her Uncle, sighed at the eventual loss of dear Patsy. She had passed on a few years ago and had, hopefully, met up with her departed husband. David and Dean rested silently together, until he reached out and popped open the cigar case sitting on his desk. Both pairs of blue eyes twinkled with enjoyment as they clipped their cigar tips and held the lighter flame for each other.

“I hope things work out for you Dean. I like her. She shows the sparkle of your Aunt’s grace under pressure. To good times!” David exclaimed. He watched as

his only niece puffed on the cigar and let the rich, Cuban flavor wrap around her taste buds. She nodded and released the sweet smoke into the room.

“Always!”

Chris conversed with the other guests until the Tanners returned. A satisfied expression on Dean’s face lifted any weight Chris had resting on her shoulders. Dean smiled a brief, shy smile in her direction before letting her eye’s sweep the rest of the rooms’ occupants.

Dean returned her gaze to the smaller woman. She moved to her side once she had a fix on everyone’s position within the small, relaxed chamber. The group had been moved since the dining was now complete. The need to be closer to Chris was a distraction that she didn’t want to analyze. She felt a tingle of awareness sweep over her as she neared the smaller woman’s side.

Joining in the conversation, she felt a small hand grip her forearm briefly; it was a welcome gesture, not missed by Dean. Dean felt the beginnings of a large grin, spreading across her face as a pair of brightly lit, green eyes, gazed in invitation.

For an instant, Chris thought she smelled a hint of a smoke that mixed in with the cologne and the leather blazer Dean wore; it was tantalizing her senses too strongly. And she wondered *what have those two been doing?*

The conversation had turned, when Dean leaned down and softly asked Chris, how she was handling the evening.

Chris smiled upward and nodded.

“It’s been nice. Your Uncle is treating us like royalty. Did you have a nice chat with him?” She asked politely, dying to know, what they had discussed. Dean nodded seriously.

“The situation has been rectified. If your willing, or wish to press any charges; my Uncle, will be more than happy to take care of it for you.” Dean spoke, while carefully reaching out to grasp the petite fingers resting on her arm.

Chris lowered her gaze and felt a moment of bitterness sweep through her body. She shared her hurt with Dean, through her gaze and felt a strength return at the shining gift of loving support, unspoken, yet seen in the eyes looking back. She clasped Dean’s hand in hers tightly and nodded her head.

“I’ll speak to him before we leave.” Chris registered the warmth of Dean’s hand as it squeezed her own briefly.

“Good.” The slightly husky, terse response in Dean’s voice, shared the taller woman’s view of the entire subject. She wanted Temple to pay for his mistake.

The evening passed and Chris wandered off for a bit to speak with David Tanner. She returned to the group with a slightly dazed expression on her face. Making a beeline for Dean’s side, she looked at her for a minute, and then asked if they could possibly retire for the evening. Dean nodded and spoke easily to the group about their upcoming departure. They said their goodbyes and entered the cab to return to the boat.

Once inside the car, they migrated naturally to each other and Dean reached over to hold Chris’ hand in her own. Without thought, Dean’s strong shoulder became a resting spot for Chris’ blonde locks as they rode in silence together. The colorful city passed by the windows.

“Driver can you drop us off at El Cielo, de la Noche?” Dean asked calmly. She didn’t want the evening to end.

The cab driver nodded and continued toward the waterside docks. A small area came into view as they neared the ocean. Stars twinkled over the bay as they exited the cab at the entrance to a small public park. The night sky was brilliantly lit by the moon overhead. A concrete path took them through the small park. As they walked along, they listened to the waves, brushing against the rocks at the bottom of the cliff.

Dean seemed to feel the night’s romantic air stirring and held Chris’ hand in the crook of her arm. She moved them confidently along as they strolled through the inner darkness of the park. Chris fully needed relief from the chaotic rush of thoughts circling in her head. She felt drained from the impact of the evening’s finished business. The silence between them deepened comfortably.

As they stopped under a beautiful arching oak, they stood close together in quiet warmth and solitude. Dean studied Chris, who was staring at the swirling waters below.

She felt the pull of Dean’s gaze and slowly turned to look upward. The darkness of the night could not hide the blue gaze staring hungrily down at her. Feeling herself drowning in the power of that gaze, she moved as close as possible toward the tall figure. Her small hands reveled in the feel of Dean’s silk top as she slid her fingers across the material.

Dean leaned down and their lips touched, parted and then devoured each other. Dean released a low growl as Chris’ tongue ran the length of the wet heat. Kissing Dean, was something Chris found she truly desired and that was a first in her life. A flutter of passion erupted inside her body as the white teeth she tasted, bit gently on her tongue. Chris forgot her tumultuous past and the

possible changes in her future, as she stood trembling with need. The erotic flashes running through her head raised her flaming passion higher. Dean released the soft bite, only to sooth over the silky surface of Chris' tongue with her own. They both murmured in total agreement at the sensuality of the moment.

Dean pulled Chris' body toward her and deepened the kiss. She felt them bind together as only lovers can. Small hands ran up and down her silk shirt as they molded together.

Aware that Chris was unfamiliar with the territory of women, with other women, Dean moved her hands lower, lightly stroking the softness of Chris' hips and behind. A full caress of Chris' backside cupped in her hands was delicious. A jolt of arousal struck them both as Chris moaned. Dean turned them slightly and pressed Chris solidly against the tree trunk.

A gasp was torn from Chris' throat as Dean spread her attention from the throbbing lips of the heated kiss to begin kissing down the side of her neck. The rush of pleasure was overwhelming and indescribable to Chris. She felt the need to pant from the flash of heat as Dean's lips and tongue swirled soft, hot patterns on her collarbone and shoulder.

Filled with desire, Dean lifted the small strap holding one shoulder of the dress in place. She stopped to lift her head and lock ardor filled eyes with Chris'. The creamy swells of her heaving breasts covered by the slightest of gauze were enticing. Dean hesitated.

"We shouldn't do this here! We can't just..." Chris panted, even as she whimpered at the overwhelming need for release. She tried to turn Dean's head downward to touch her skin.

Dean blinked at the green orbs that gave her permission, even though her verbal claim differed. She looked down at the fierce grip, that Chris had on the silk of her shirt and then at the closed eyes, waiting for Dean to deliver. The soft skin of her breast was so tempting, that Dean practically whimpered as she pulled away from the offering.

Chivalry was not dead.

Dean stepped away, putting distance between them. She did not want Chris to regret anything they might have in the future for one quick stroll in the darkness of a park. Chris' eyes instantly flew open.

Chris stood with a confused expression, wondering, 'why they stopped?' Until her view widened and took in the surrounding park and the woman standing there who appeared equally flustered. With a gasp of dismay, aching and full of

regret, Chris snapped back to reality. Without realizing it, her mind instantly tripped over the glorious sensations, she had been feeling in Dean's arms and twisted the reason for them stopping, as being her own fault. She stumbled to apologize. Having Dean sweep her into those strong arms, urging her in soft tones, to 'hush baby', had tears leaking out of the corners of her eyes. She held herself stiffly, listening to the low murmur of Dean's tenor voice until the warmth of their bodies melded together again.

Dean leaned back, without releasing Chris and looked into the bright tear-filled eyes.

"I'm sorry for rushing this with you. Please don't be angry with me?" Dean asked of the now, understanding and fully stunned woman, she was holding in her arms. Chris couldn't believe it. Dean was worried about her? She managed to nod her vague understanding into the silk of Dean's shirt as they began to walk back toward the park exit.

"I am afraid..." Dean began and it ended there. Chris looked up at the tall, confident, woman and recognized a familiar insecurity, that they both shared. Chris wondered how this could possibly be, when they were so dynamically different.

Dean seemed to read her mind as she spoke.

"I'm almost certainly, unlike anyone you've ever met. I've never led a normal lifestyle in more ways, than just by my being gay. My life has been strangely overly protected, first by my family and then by being in the military. I may have had some relationships before, but they were highly guarded and quite short. I have never really had an honest to goodness partner and have never felt the loss of that part in my life." Dean ran her hand down Chris' shoulder to clasp her hand in her own.

Chris felt a lump forming in her throat at that last statement and internally wondered, just what the hell Dean thought about her now? Dean squeezed the tensing hand she held, trying to get Chris' attention.

"Hey? I never missed that aspect of my life because I had never met anyone, that could fill it." Dean never blinked as she raised the hand that she held, up to her lips to kiss. "Until now, Chris. Until now!"

Chris melted at the motion and the words. This woman was pure passion and it was bound to be trouble. She blushed as Dean smiled down at her.

"Just understand, that this is becoming really important to me and I don't want to rush anything, that you and I may share. I will probably regret this later, but I

don't regret it now. I am not ready for more, but it's not because I don't want more. Understand?"

Chris completely understood and was thankful in many ways. She had never been in a long-term relationship either. Her feelings from Temple's attack were probably waiting to spring forth and she knew that she had issues dealing with her family and upbringing. However, she seemed unable to resist Dean Tanner. She smiled up at the woman with warmth as she realized she felt protected and special, as well as, cared for. Chris was more than willing to explore this with Dean. As long as they both agreed to be careful.

Silently, they held hands, forming an unspoken pact to take things slowly. They caught a cab, the both of them feeling tired and elated at the same time.

"What you do to me Chris. It should be illegal." Dean half whispered, her voice husky with arousal. She breathed in the fresh scent of shampoo from the smaller woman's hair. Chris shook her head, resting it softly against Dean's chest.

"What you do to me is illegal in the US. But, I've never..." She stated hesitantly, glancing up into Dean's eyes that changed from deep blue to dark purple. Chris swam in the growing heat of desire.

Chris' awareness of any others faded into the background. Dean was now, and hopefully forever, the one who could transport Chris to a new world of passion. Chris had never felt so alive.

"Goodnight." Chris hugged Dean tighter, trying to express some of the new feelings that she was experiencing.

"Baby? It's daylight in one hour. I have to get dressed to raise anchor."

Chris grabbed Dean's watch and twisted it slightly in order to see the hour. She was shocked as she read 5:00 am in the morning. Dean hugged her and gently pushed her toward her door. Chris moved quickly and stood on tiptoe dragging Dean's head down. She kissed her and moved back to her door.

"See you in the morning, sailor."

Dean watched as the tired woman entered her cabin and she turned to head toward her own. She grinned slightly at the thought of sending her uncle an amendment to the policy on fraternization. First officers and captains were exempt.

"Good night." Chris whispered to her image in the mirror. She pursed her lips to stop them from grinning. They sprang back into a smile as she left the bathroom. Entering her bedroom she ran across the room to her bed and flopped down on

the cover. She curled her arms around a pillow and snuggled up as she fell into a deep sleep.

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**Disclaimer:**

1. **Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Nope, not in this section unless you include the almost drowning episode.
3. **Sexual content:** Ummm, no and yes and no...omg hawttttt!
4. **Special thanks:** to my younger sister for kind of prodding me onward. I got writers block a few times cause I didn't have any Oreos.
5. **Language:** No

## Deepest Ocean Green Part 5

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island, and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

Dean sipped her third cup of coffee for the hour. Her jaw was clenched tight as she suppressed another yawn and steered the massive ship through the coastal waters. She checked and double-checked her calculated headings as the flotilla moved along. Sipping her new best friend, Mr. Coffee, she thought about Chris and couldn't help, but smile. She closed her eyes replaying the kiss they had shared. After she took a sip, inhaling a bit of coffee into her windpipe, Dean began choking. She covered her mouth to avoid spraying the hot beverage across the window that she'd been fantasizing in front of. Managing a wheezing intake of air, she moved to the console, coughing. Being a career Navy officer, trained both to save lives and work in numerous types of diving scenarios; if the coffee didn't kill her, the irony would. Drowning on a cup of coffee after 20 years of service, it was too incredible for her to believe, much less, to try explaining it to someone else.

The door clicked shut behind her as Chris entered the war room. She watched as Dean leaned back and poured water into her mouth like a dehydrated athlete at a marathon. Her attentions were drawn to the sound as Dean inhaled wetly and then watched, as she started another bout of coughing. Chris rushed over and pounded on her back. Dean, who was trying to swallow the mouthful of water, spit it outward in surprise. The clipboard resting on the ledge at the

window took the worst of it. The rest bounced off the window and landed on Dean's boots. Dean rolled her eyes at the petite woman and started laughing at the whole lunacy of the moment. Mark chuckled along and with great sarcasm and a spinning wrist, he handed her a towel from the coffee bar. Dean grabbed it and began to clean the area as Chris shook her head at the taller woman.

"You OK, skipper?" Chris asked in a soft voice. She frowned when; both Mark and Dean started chuckling again.

"I'm fine, hon...Top!" Dean corrected hurriedly as she glanced over at Mark, then apologetically at Chris. Chris stood stunned for a moment.

*She just called me honey!* Chris thought to herself, experiencing a warm feeling flowing inside. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure as she quickly grabbed a towel and wiped down the rest of the ledge.

Dean watched her first officer and speculated at the slight grin on her beaming face. Dean grinned along with her.

The captain excused herself from day duty as the workday ended. Her attention to detail was slipping as she had tried to caffeine, her way awake. Reaching a point where she was moderately comfortable with the situation, she checked out and headed to her berth. The ship would stay on course for quite some time before she would be needed. Right now, she only craved her bed and some much needed rest.

Cutting across the top-level lido deck area, she was suddenly aware of some high-pitched, childish squeals of exuberant and playful laughter, which brought a smile to her face. She glanced over at the pool's surface to check out the situation and saw the family trio that she had befriended on the walkway, playing together in the shallow end.

She slowed her stride and then turned to head over near the mini bar nearby. She promised herself, she would just take a few minutes to enjoy the show as she settled upon a barstool. The bartender on duty handed her the cold bottled water that she requested and then shied away to try and look busy. Dean watched as Georgia and Brooke proceeded to toss little Brandy back and forth. Her small arms were encased in cartoon covered arm floaters; she screamed as she flew! It was a sight to see. Dean smiled and chuckled as Georgia, who was quite a bit shorter than her partner, kept getting the brunt of the water splashed in her face. She eventually cupped her hands together and started splashing back at Brooke when Brandy held onto Brooke's arms. Brooke took a full measure of water in her face before she flipped Brandy onto her back and they went shark hunting. The sounds of the theme from Jaws had Georgia looking for a quick retreat. Her excited scream escaped as Brandy and Brooke popped up around

her with gusto. The watershed drenched the small blonde as she claimed the gang warfare rights of 'no fair.

About this time, Brandy noticed, that the captain was sitting nearby.

“Captain! Captain! Come play wif us?” Her girlish laughter tugged at Dean’s heart. Brooke and Georgia turned to look at the reclining officer and waved. Before they could stop her, Brandy had pulled herself up out of the pool and was running over to Dean.

Dean raised her eyebrows with some alarm as Brooke and Georgia had just missed grabbing the little tadpole. Dean stood and briskly walked around the few recliners at the poolside and met Brandy halfway. Brandy clung to Dean’s leg like a leech.

“Come play Captain! C...c...come play!” Brandy held tight to the pant leg long enough to sit down on Dean’s shoe and wrap her limbs around the whole leg. Dean laughed out loud.

“I’m watching you three play. What in the world have I got attached to my leg?” Dean played along, as she walked with a limp, back over to the little girl's parents.

“Did ya’ll loose something?” Dean inquired laughingly.

“Sorry about that Captain.” Brooke motioned to the now drenched pant leg. Dean shrugged smiling.

“Brandy, come get back in the pool, sweetheart.” Brandy grinned her biggest grin straight up at Dean, then released her grip and turned to jump back into the pool. The chlorine water sparkled as it splashed upward. Dean stepped back slightly and grinned down at the three of them.

“We can’t thank you enough, Captain. This first class service is wonderful. The pool downstairs is packed.” Georgia’s slightly southern accent came through as she pulled the dog paddling Brandy to her side. The three of them looked refreshed. Dean wondered if she might swim some laps later, when the pool area was deserted. She made a mental note to get some exercise in the cool, inviting waters before the evening ended. Looking down at her totally drenched pant leg, she rolled her eyes at the sight. Dean gave in to the urge to pull the soggy pant leg away from her calf. She refrained from any “wet” comments in front of Brandy.

“Glad your enjoying it. Don’t forget to take Brandy over to the kid’s center. She will enjoy it immensely, so I’m told and it will give you some time to visit our more

adult arenas. Brooke nodded in agreement, winking up at Dean. Brandy clapped her hands together as Dean leaned down to tousle her wet head.

“I’ve heard they make all sorts of great Indian headdresses and let you camp out under the stars in a real live tent.” Brandy’s eyes got really large with excitement. She looked over at her mom, and then turned to Georgia, biting her lip coyly. Georgia rolled her eyes.

“Why am I the decision maker here? Go climb on your mom, munchkin. I’m sure, that she can drop you by the center to see what’s happening there. We’ll check into it.” Brandy squealed and lunged into her mom’s outstretched hands. Dean stood taking a closer look at the green bikini Georgia wore. It suddenly registered in her thick skull, she was actually looking more at the curves of the woman who wore it. Glancing over at Brooke quickly, she caught the amused eyes of the taller woman. Brooke pursed her lips slightly and then grinned. Dean felt a slight blush rising and grinned back sheepishly.

“Sorry bout that!” She apologized to Brooke and then felt twice as bad, when Georgia cleared her throat. Dean closed her eyes, rubbing her forehead with chagrin. She was pinned by the sight of Georgia’s raised eyebrow. Dean felt like her feet were sinking and reached out of the quicksand, with the only ammo she had. She turned, aiming her full blue gaze at Georgia and gave her a lop-sided grin.

“Nice swimsuit!” She maintained her gaze above the obviously, very desirable, curved form of the petite woman; she let her magnetic eyes convey her apology and her appreciation. Georgia stood in the pool water, next to her partner and felt a slight shiver dance across her skin as those penetrating eyes looked into her own. She forced herself to break the gaze and then look over at her lover’s darker stare. The shivering feeling deepened, as she fell once again into the obviously, loving gaze. Georgia, feeling slightly off balance with all the attention, blushed red with her body’s traitorous reaction. Brooke watched her lover of ten years and recognized the confusion she was experiencing. She grinned up at the tall, good-looking, captain in her ice cream colored uniform and felt a slight moment of jealousy until she realized the situation. She broke out in a fit of hilarity as she reached out and swept her woman up, cradling her in her arms. Her laughter only deepened as she watched her wife turn crimson with embarrassment.

“You are to cute for words!” She whispered into Georgia’s ear.

Brooke took pity on the woman in her arms and in a strong authoritative voice, she commanded the Captain of the vessel. “Stop You! Oh tall, dark and uniformed! Desist looking at my girl. She can’t take it!” Brooke joked with Dean, as Georgia curled up against her lover’s side in the pool. Dean bowed her head contritely in remorse and tried to hide her smile from the grinning, Brooke.

"I'll remember that!" Dean answered, clearing her throat of the embarrassment, she'd felt at her blunder. Changing the subject quickly, she tried to get the two women to relax.

"Make sure that you visit the islands. Don't forget that we have the highest recommended staff for babysitting patrol either. Brandy would have a ball at the kid's center. They have a lot of programs made just for her age group." Dean commented as she stepped back from the pool edge. Brooke nodded as Georgia un-tucked her head from her lover's neckline. Brandy had climbed around to her mother's back and was hanging on as she kicked her feet in the water.

"Will do, Captain. Hope to see you around. Thanks again for the upgrade!" Brooke responded enthusiastically. Dean nodded as she turned to the munchkin.

"Don't forget to show me what you get from Santa, little one. And make sure you ask me to visit my control room before your vacation is over. I want to show you a really big telescope we keep up there to show off to special people. Okay?" Dean watched Brandy's eyes light up with all the excitement a 5 year old can manage.

"OK, Captain!" She answered with a squeal. Dean laughed and turned to head to her berth. She smiled all the way to her bed.

Hours later, glancing at her watch, Chris noted the time and mentally checked off the completed schedule of events listed for today. The Christmas Eve spectacular on deck two, held mainly for the kids, had wrapped up two hours ago. The Santa and elf volunteers were plentiful and she hadn't received any complaints. By now, four days into the cruise, the parents were beginning to realize that the boat had many adult offerings too. The use of the babysitting service had sky rocketed. Chris had previously encountered this from other voyages and had already implemented a full time nursery center. With a maximum capacity of 40 kids at one time, she had yet to hear of any complaints there, either. The people aboard seemed to be overly gratuitous and very forgiving during the holiday cruises. The ship's personnel seemed to be in high spirits at the moment.

Enjoying the star filled sky, Chris walked around the top deck eyeing the cabinets and placement of stowed equipment containers. She'd rarely had vandalism occur in the first class level, however it wasn't completely unheard of. Deck two and three, had already reported some life vests and a designer set of oars, that had been stolen out of the storage bins. They had most likely become souvenirs, stolen for the cruise line logo, which was stitched into the surface. She frowned

at the loss of the survival gear. Her purser glared ominously, each time a theft was reported to him in the financial meeting. He would probably have a stroke, when the final tally was made, reporting the many towels and bathroom dispensers that had been taken after the people disembarked.

Chris made her way past the etched glass, brass handled, double-entry doorway of the high roller's casino and blinked at the clouds of smoke escaping by seeping through the crack at the bottom of the doors. She grimaced at the sight and steered a wide path around it as she continued further down the walkway. The undertones of the music playing within caused a low vibration. She heard it fading as she moved along.

Heading toward the nearby cabinet of vests, she stopped, near a flagpole and boat container. Her view was blocked, but she froze as she heard the voices coming closer.

"Don't worry, honey. She is having a blast. Right now, she is probably snuggling down into her sleeping bag and falling fast asleep from exhaustion." A woman calmly stated.

"I'm not worried about her. I just..." another woman's voice pleaded and then a brief chuckle. "OK, so maybe, I worry too much!"

Chris heard them moving down the ramp past her. She turned and watched as Brooke and Georgia walking arm in arm, paused to hug each other. The hug became a sweet kiss as Brooke leaned down to Georgia. What it became from there was something so much deeper. The two women melted together. Chris watched them through the moonlight, as they deepened their connection. Her eyes followed the soft hands that began to touch bare skin. She heard the tantalizing sounds of softly spoken, sweet nothings as the two lovers shared each other. Chris, standing in the shadows, felt embarrassed to be witnessing the moment as an interloper. But, she couldn't ignore the feeling of arousal that fluttered wildly in her stomach. As she watched, she was mesmerized and unable to look away. A soft moan floated in the air and Chris shivered in reaction. She briefly closed her eyes, breathing deeply in response. When she opened them, Brooke and Georgia were moving down the walkway. Brooke had her arm wrapped around Georgia firmly.

Chris stood in the shadows for quite a few moments; trying to control the warmth of the heat, she felt in her face. She brushed her arm over her breasts and tingled with the feeling as she realized that her nipples were hard. She felt her heart beating fast and took deep breaths to calm down.

Moving from the concealed corner, she leaned against the railing of the ship and let the colder ocean air cleanse her thoroughly. Eventually, she moved back

down the walk and headed toward the swimming pool to make her way to her cabin.

Dean woke up around nine at night. Her body curiously lethargic and feeling weighted, she decided that the earlier idea of swimming some laps had been a good one. She found her one-piece swimsuit. After donning that, some shorts and a t-shirt that said, 'If the boat is a rock'n...' she grabbed a towel and headed for the pool.

Dean was surprised at finding the empty pool until she remembered that the Christmas Eve festivities were occurring down below. She grinned like a child as she stripped off her t-shirt and shorts. The underwater floodlights in the pool, made the water crystal clear as she entered it. She watched as her feet and legs were slowly submerged until she could put it off no longer. Gritting her teeth, she pushed away from the wall. The growl she made, was one of acceptance for the colder water. Albeit, while she was somewhat chilled by the ocean air, the pool water was heated and her body acclimated quickly. She made her way down to one end and looked down the length of the pool at the other, which was 25 meters away. Snapping her water goggles down over her eyes, she pushed her six-foot frame off the wall and began the first of many laps.

Thirty minutes later, Chris rounded the corner of the walkway and moved out into the pool area. The lone swimmer, doing laps, caught her attention for the moment as she surveyed the almost empty area. Moving closer to the pool, she straightened some chairs at a table. Something looked familiar about the swimmer, a niggling recognition that stayed just out of reach, as the swimmer flipped at one end of the pool and swam underwater, back toward the other end. Within seconds, she was back on the surface and cleanly cutting through the water.

Chris found herself watching the professional swimming performance with envy. Broad shoulders and strong arms pulled the body through the water smoothly, while powerful legs kicked strongly from behind. The swimmer slowed and finally stopped, near the end of the pool, where Chris stood.

Dean rose up in the 5 feet of water, she didn't hear the gasp of surprise that Chris released, when she realized, just who it was.

Still breathing deeply, Dean took off the goggles and wiped a hand over her dripping face.

Chris took that opportunity to glance downward and immediately noticed the pointed nipples, which stood out conspicuously against the tight fabric of the wet swimsuit.

Dean looked up, found Chris standing there and grinned crookedly.

“Hey there, lady!” Dean said, while trying to catch her breath.

Chris' eyes rose instantly. She tried to avoid looking at the defining cut of the swimsuit as it pushed Dean's breasts upward, showing ample cleavage. Chris replied with a wavering smile as she tried to calm her wandering thoughts. Her body went on immediate alert, when Dean simply lifted herself out of the pool in one quick movement.

“Hi, yourself!” Chris said, as she watched the practically naked woman walk toward her. The long, muscular legs flexed as the glow from the pool lights reflected on the droplets of water that ran down her skin. Chris tore her eyes away from the fit body and looked over at the pool. She felt a flush of heat envelop her.

At the last minute, Dean stopped before a chair, which held her towel and clothing. Chris hadn't noticed it there. Dean wrapped the towel around her waist and donned the T-shirt over her wet skin. She didn't want the cool night air making her shiver.

“Are you OK?” Dean asked, stepping closer to Chris as she tried to make eye contact with her. Chris looked up at the taller woman, while trying to relax as much as possible and not let Dean notice, that she was being ogled.

“I was just admiring your swimming. Your very good at it.” Chris commented as she fidgeted by pushing the nearby chair under the table to cover her obvious nervousness. Dean smiled again and nodded.

“Thank you. It had a lot to do with the Navy, but I am comfortable in the water.” Chris nodded and looked down at her watch.

“I'm officially off shift. Tomorrow is Key West and I was going to take in some island time during my off hours. Would you care to join me?” Chris asked, holding her breath until she heard the response.

“Actually, its four hours until we dock and then I'm free, give or take a few hours of official protocol, checking some engineering logs. I would love to go with you. Shall we meet around 10:00 am?” Dean gestured for Chris to move ahead of her with a bow and a leading arm to guide the way as they both began to walk toward the cabins.

“That would be perfect. We can get breakfast and then head over on one of the island boats.” Dean nodded and agreed. She reached over and ran a hand down Chris' uniform covered arm. The touch stopped her in her tracks.

"I like the way you look too, First Officer Parker. Very much so." Dean's voice was lower in timber as she ran her thumb over the elbow of Chris' shirt and then let go. Chris trembled slightly as she waited for Dean to make the next move. Dean just motioned her forward toward the cabin hallway. The pair stopped outside Chris' door and Dean hesitated for a moment. She wanted to wrap Chris up in her arms and kiss her.

Chris made that decision for them as she unlocked her door and tugged on the towel wrapped around Dean, pulling her into the room. She shut the door behind the smiling Dean and leaned back against it. Biting her lip, she studied the taller woman with a curiosity and longing in her eyes.

"Please, kiss me again Dean." Chris asked as she watched Dean's blue eyes turn darker. The sensations of excitement rose in her as Dean moved closer and gently touched her face.

"Thank you. For allowing me the sweetest pleasure." Dean leaned down and pressed her warm lips to Chris' forehead. Then she moved her lips to caress the corner of Chris' eye. The soft touch continued as Dean brushed lips across her cheekbone until Chris turned and tilted her chin upward to seal their lips together.

They both parted their lips as the kiss deepened. Dean felt teeth capture her lip and a bite, followed by a soft wet tongue to lave the pain away. She moaned as she reached out to taste Chris. Their tongues wrapped around each other, as they tasted each other thoroughly. Without thought, Chris reached up and ran her palm over the hard nipple poking through the wet material Dean wore. Dean trembled in response.

A sense of wonder passed through Chris, when she felt Dean's reaction to her touch. She suddenly felt a power over the other woman and was amazed at the feeling. Dean broke off the kiss and pulled away from Chris drawing air into her lungs. She could barely contain her need as she realized, that the only thing stopping her from being naked was a swimsuit and some damp skin. Her blood boiled with the heat of her thoughts.

"We need to stop this, Chris. Before we can't stop it." Dean glanced over at the heavily lidded, green eyes watching her. They stood staring at each other, while trying to let their excited bodies calm down a bit. Finally, Chris dropped her gaze and reached back behind her, feeling around for the doorknob. She opened the door slowly and held it, partially open for Dean to leave.

Dean crossed to the door and gently pressed it closed once more as she pressed her body into Chris'. She leaned down and gently kissed her way down the side of the blonde's neck. She tasted her way down to a collarbone and let her hands roam upward to cup the pert breasts that were hiding under the blazer Chris was wearing.

Chris trembled at the kisses. She felt the flames of pleasure building inside her and relished the electrifying sensations Dean provided. She had never felt this way before. Her skin was on fire. A gasp escaped her throat as fingers roamed over her, touching the soft skin beneath a now opened button of her blouse. She arched into the larger woman's body.

Dean growled as she felt Chris slide her fingers into the short hair at the nape of her neck. She shivered in response as fingernails playfully scratched the back of her neck. Her mind slipped deeper under the spell of blissful pleasure. Chris' blouse was almost completely opened, when someone knocked on the outer door.

Both women froze and stopped breathing. They stared at each other silently as the knock came twice more. Chris shook her head slowly, left and then right, silently informing Dean that she was not going to answer. Dean drew a deep breath and held her tightly as they trembled together and listened to the retreating footsteps.

Dean slowly released her and stepped back from the door breaking the connection between their bodies. Chris felt so weak. She grasped the door handle to stay upright. They recovered in the silence as the minutes went by.

"I can't seem to stay away from you." Dean ran her fingers roughly through her hair, straightening the mussed appearance it had. She worried that she was moving too fast with everything. She wanted to romance her soon to be lover, but the idea of Chris feeling threatened, or intimidated by Dean caused her stomach to clench in disgust. She knew that Chris was attracted to her and that they were both highly aroused, but she didn't want to cause future problems for them by rushing.

Chris bit her lip, nodding in agreement. The seductive remark had her blushing as it hit home and she wanted nothing more than to continue to kiss those soft lips. Though she did feel slightly apprehensive about the final outcome of their encounter. Chris had always picked someone that she knew would be safe. Having a history of going on only a few dates in the past, the encounters amounted to nothing more than getting to first base. She and her dates had kissed, but nothing more. She felt her naivety shining through in her innocence. Although she trusted Dean to be the experienced one and guide them both, she knew that together, they caused a spark to become a roaring flame. Too many vivid images of the two of them in various states of making love flashed before Chris' mind and she shivered with renewed desire. *Forget how safe Dean might be.* She drew in a deep breath just thinking about it. Chris struggled with her growing desires toward the tall captain.

Her thoughts circled around to focus on how she could please Dean. *Could I satisfy her? What am I supposed to do to make that happen? Does the ship's library carry any books of instruction?* Chris dropped her eyes to the floor to hide the foolish humor her inner thoughts had taken.

“What are you thinking about, sweetheart? You’re blushing!”

Chris looked up to meet those dazzling blue eyes and felt her insides melt once again. Dean met the sparkling green gaze and knew, that her heart was taken. She almost walked back over and took Chris in her arms; she stopped herself from taking up where they had left off.

“Are you OK? I don’t want to rush anything. I think I should leave.” Dean reached out and ran her fingers down Chris’ cheek, giving her a tender caress. Chris leaned into the touch and nodded her agreement.

They parted with the promise to meet for breakfast and go ashore for a few hours the next day.

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While searching for the elusive Fountain of Youth, Ponce De Leon chronicled the rock filled islands of Key West in 1513. Originally, the Calusa Indian tribe inhabited the Cayo, (Key) Hueso, (weyso for West). But, successive years of plundering pirates managed to define it as ‘Island of Bones’, a place where shipwrecks occurred. The tiny 3 x 5 mile wide island, being the last on a chain of the Floridian Key's, now completes the southern route of U.S. Interstate, 1. This Interstate extends southwest of Miami, FL to bridge across to the islands from Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, and the Lower Keys into the last of the bustling tourist arena, Key West. A tropical paradise full of delicious island flavor, it had become a must stop vacation spot for the island seeking tourist.

The ship arrived around four a.m. and anchored in the natural harbor made by the far west outcropping of Wisteria Island and the northwest, Fleming Key peninsula. By six, the first tour boat was taking off loaded with tourists heading for Mallory Square, the famous Key West Sunset Celebration pier.

Just one of many attractions to explore, Mallory Square begins it's daily sunrise routine by providing exhibitions of arts and crafts, street performers, food carts, psychics and more to the thousands of tourists visiting from around the world. Then each night before sunset, masses of people, both locals and tourists alike, flock to the water's edge to watch the sun sink into the Gulf of Mexico.

The ship was scheduled to stay anchored for 15 hours before resuming it's course. The tourist hot spot could be covered many times over in that window of

opportunity. The majority of the tourists planned for two main attractions, beach time, or scuba diving.

In any direction Key West is a beach. Superb dining was offered at well-established restaurants such as Turtle Krauls, Key West Beach House, and Half Shell Raw Bar and Grill. Beach entertainment included sporting activities like jet skiing, wave runner rentals, parasailing, or surfing, along with the ever present, less expensive sport of swimming, or playing in the soft sands.

Off shore was the true element of the island chain, where complete ecological wonders resided as part of the many coral reefs of Florida. In Key West, the ability to scuba dive was considered as normal as owning a cell phone in California. The five miles of coral reef, made of tall heads of brain coral, star coral, and pillar coral along with many other structural coral mounds intertwined with vast plateaus. The plateaus are covered with hard and soft corals and sponges, a snorkeling and diving delight. A mile further out from the main reef line is an outer reef area. The water life here is second to none in the U.S. Parrotfish, angelfish, butterfly fish and other bright tropical fish are very common in the front reef, as well as stingrays, eels, nurse sharks and turtles in the outer, deeper waters. Deep-water gorgonians and grouper, resident Jewfish and large green moray eels, have homes in some of the shipwrecks sunk off the reef; along with plenty of yellowtail, grunts, wrasse and barracuda, living in the ocean depths.

The two women walked along the downward path toward the beach. Dean blindly followed her companion, who led the way, as she watched a lone surfer riding the crest of an incoming curl in the distance. The sand felt wet and cool on their bare feet as they walked the beach.

“I love this side of the island. It seems, so wild and restless.” Chris pointed to the crashing waves, hitting the coral reefs off the coast. She pointed in a few different directions out in the distant waters and indicated the reef names and locations; Nine Foot Snake, Western Sambo, Pelican Shoal. Her hand came up to shade her eyes from the glare of the sun dancing on the water's surface. The sunglasses she wore, helped only slightly. Both of them squinted as they watched the pelicans floating in place over a nearby dock filled with fishermen.

Dean thrust her hands into her khaki shorts and wiggled her toes in the sand. The wind ruffled through her short dark hair, tickling her scalp with its freshness. She felt a growing relief from the pressures of her day-to-day existence

Although, she usually thought of the Captain's position as a well-earned privilege, she knew the job was demanding as any other career could be. For a few moments, while they stood looking out at the ocean's tide, she felt humbled by the seemingly endless, roiling tide of blues and greens. She was awed by the powerful surge of continuous waves that rushed up and down the sandy beach.

Her little piece of heaven was largely amplified as Chris shyly linked their arms together. They grinned at each other and continued down the beach.

After sharing a fantastic brunch from one of the Mallory Square restaurants, they walked around the piers, site seeing for a while. The southern beach that they now explored, was just past the public hotel area and was much less populated, than the lounge filled, sand castle building, tanning, tourism mess that they had passed by earlier. The cool winds of the last month of the year were a steady reminder that they were encountering the winter, here in the tropical center. Yet the sun still shone down and sought out the oiled up skin of the nearest tan seeking, exposed body.

“Let’s rest under those palm trees over there.” Dean pointed to a small group of trees nearby. Chris nodded and they made their way across the bright sand to reach the shaded base of some native palms. Dean sat down with her back to the base of the tree and spread her legs, patting the sand in front of her. She waggled her eyebrow's up at Chris and waited for Chris to sit down. Chris blushed slightly and then smiled. She sat down, keeping her back, adjacent to Dean's front and scooted in between her legs. She was immediately wrapped in strong arms and leaned back into the warmth of Dean’s body, sighing contentedly. Dean exhaled happily too.

Dean held a sense of perfection as their bodies formed together effortlessly. Soft blonde hair pillowed Chris’ head, resting in the curve of Dean’s neck. She had comfortably rested her arms along the length of the strong thighs surrounding her. The muscles flexed against her as she softly trailed her fingertips over bare skin at the edge of the shorts. Dean inhaled Chris’ natural body fragrance of floral scented shampoo and soap as she sat enjoying the full contact they shared. They both watched the ocean moving before them, while their bond to each other strengthened as the waves crashed onto the beach.

They began to talk about their lives. The events of the past and memories of happy moments, that they'd experienced. Dean began to speak of her family, her childhood and her love of the ocean. She told Chris of her ultimate desire to be able to sail the seas at her leisure. She spoke of a boat, she had bought just recently and how she was going to explore the world from its bow. The whole story had Chris envisioning the tall Captain steering her vessel off into the sunset. Dean’s story ended and silence reigned for a while until Chris began to speak of her varied experiences in her career. She slowly began to talk about her past and her family, as Dean listened carefully. The arms holding her tightened with emotion as she stumbled through, explaining her teen years. Her voice, at times, lowered to a mere whisper, full of pain as she spoke about the life altering events she had endured. Dean held her close, ignoring the tears that were falling down her own cheeks. She murmured words of encouragement to Chris, trying to help her continue. Chris explained how after the breakdown, she had eventually run away to go live with her Aunt Janice in Fort Lauderdale.

The helpful Aunt had convinced Chris to see a professional therapist. Over the next three years, the female therapist had helped Chris rebuild her strengths and find her center to handle the flashes of insecurities, that she still had. She told Dean about her beginning years on the cruise line and her growing happiness as a part of Tanner Industries.

Eventually, they both fell silent and reveled in the closeness of just being together.

Dean wanted to stay that way forever. *What would happen when Chris accepted the Captain position? How could we be together?* Dean frowned at her inner thoughts and closed her eyes, drawing in a deep breath of fresh air and Chris' scent. *We will just have to work something out.*

Chris leaned into the strong body behind her and practically purred her satisfaction. The only thing holding her back from looking at her future was the overwhelming fear of losing the connection with the woman that she was quickly falling in love with. She needed to sit down and think about her future...but what future would she have, if Dean were not in it. She wanted her cake and ice cream suited sailor too.

The time arrived, when they realized that returning to the ship was necessary.

Standing to stretch and give each other a comforting hug before they returned. Dean paused, resting brow to brow with Chris. She looked into those gorgeous, green eyes, aware of the trust that was being given. She wondered how anyone could be compelled to break such a gift. Chris looked up into twin pools of blue and found strength, emanating from their depths. She felt herself drowning, reaching into them for safety and saw understanding, looking back. Dean radiated her love outward, forcing Chris to hold her breath from the intensity of its heat.

“Thank you for sharing all of that with me, Chris.” Dean pressed a gentle kiss to Chris’ forehead. Chris closed her eyes and swallowed a lump of gratitude at Dean’s acceptance of her. The distant chimes of a church rang out in celebration of the holiday season. Dean squeezed her tightly for a moment, reassuring her and then stepped back.

They began the trek back to the ship and boarded the tour boat along with many others. The evening sky was beginning to fall into sunset. The tour boat returned them to the ship's boarding area and they made their way back to their respective cabins.

Dean paused at Chris’ door.

“I enjoyed spending time with you. Thank you, Chris.”

Chris flushed with pleasure and smiled back.

“I also wanted to say Merry Christmas!” Dean shyly retrieved a small, square, Christmas wrapped, package from her pocket. She held it out to the surprised First Officer, gesturing for Chris to take it.

Chris flushed with pleasure and grinned.

“You didn’t have to do that.” Chris opened the wrapping and found a small sailboat symbol on the cover. She glanced up at Dean and looked for a hint. Dean smiled, as she quirked a challenging eyebrow.

“Open it!” She urged.

Chris lifted the top cover from the box and stood bemused, as she stared at what looked like a stainless steel pocket watch, resting in the velvet lining of the box. She removed it from the container and examined the delicate design. A raised sailboat insignia and a small button to release the fob lid, were the main features of the highly polished stainless steel item. As she pressed the button to release the lid, she gasped in pleasure. A detailed, intricate, faceplate of a compass was displayed beneath the spring action lid. A small engraving caught her eye. She felt tears gather as she read the sweet words etched into the steel.

“Captain Chris Parker. May the destination of your life’s voyage always be easily found. With love, Dean.”

Chris reached over and rested her hand against the warmth that Dean provided. She drew in a breath and looked up into the sparkling eyes looking down at her.

“You do have a way with words, Captain Tanner. Thank you.” She stated, profoundly grateful Dean had understood the importance of her promotional circumstances. Now she felt an excitement toward her promotion, knowing that Dean was behind her in the decision of accepting David’s offer of training. Chris reverently ran a thumb over the closed lid of the compass. No matter what else happened with the offer, she knew Dean was behind her 100 percent. She felt a burden lift from her, allowing her the freedom to give Dean a radiant smile. Dean blinked at the stunning beauty.

“I have something for you too!” Chris hesitated; as she bent down to get inside one of the bags, which she'd collected from Mallory Square before returning to the ship.

She pulled out a bulky square box, gift wrapped for the holidays, with Santa wrapping. A small card was attached, dangling off the wrapping by a string.

Dean had both eyebrows raised into her hairline in surprise. She was handed a slightly heavy box and told to open it. Chris giggled at Dean's expression.

Unwrapping the paper, she discovered a plain brown box. As she opened it...she found a shining, bronze, ship bell about eight inches in height. The image of a ship's wheel was cast into the side. It was mounted to a wooden brace and was engraved with a phrase.

"Set your course by the stars."

The card had a short message from Chris.

To reach the port of heaven... we must sail, sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it - but we must sail, may your voyage include a sunset. Love, Chris. Dean rang the bell softly in awe. It was a sweet gift and she loved it. She leaned down and kissed Chris softly.

"Thank you, sweetheart."

Chris smiled, her eyes twinkling with great pleasure.

Chris bent down and picked up a stray piece of paper that had fallen. She shoved it into the box and bag and turned to release the latch to her door. She hesitated for a moment, looking at Dean.

"Would you like to come inside for a while?" Dean smiled and moved slightly closer to Chris.

"What have you got on your mind?" Her seductive tones made Chris blush. She looked down at her feet and then, backed up, shyly.

"I have a lot on my mind and it's all about you." Dean stared at the green-eyed siren that she stood near. She drew in a deep breath of desire.

"I think I will have to decline for the evening." Dean's voice was full of regret. "I have a new shift in less than six hours and..." she paused to look into Chris' eyes, "...I don't want to have anything interrupt us, when we do finally make love."

Dean watched as green eyes dilated and Chris' breathing became shallow at her whispered words. She reached up and ran a finger down the soft cheek. Chris shivered and moved into her room. Dean stepped back and grinned at her, with that lopsided smile.

"I'll see you soon!" Chris nodded at the parting words.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Disclaimer:**

**Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickyMaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickyMaster@aol.com)

**Violence:** Some, reflected in memories, of a past rape.

**Sexual content:** \*\*\*\*Warning WILLA ROBINSON Warning\*\*\*\*YES, quite a lot, HOT, Scorching, Steaming, Blazing...and well just plain damn sensual. This is PART 6. I had a deadline and I did not get to complete the entire story. The desired sexual content is included. Hot lovin every night....!!!! And it's between two women. Imagine that! Yes I can! :)

**Special thanks:** to my beta for breaking it all down to the raw part and building it all back up. Plus, thanks to Safeway and their endless supply of Oreo's.

**Language:** ummm some. I spell out B I T C ....u know the rest...see....your not so clean either.

**Deepest Ocean Green Part 6**

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island, and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

Dean stripped off her shorts and polo shirt, tossing them into a nearby laundry bag. She quickly showered and wearily crawled into her bed, naked. Her body felt drained from the mental battles she had raged. In her mind, she'd wanted to strangle something outright. While listening to Chris she had tried to keep a steady look of concern on her face. The heartbreakingly labored, stuttering, confession that had been revealed to Dean, was just soul wrenching to listen too. Letting her anger show about the situations that Chris had dealt with, wouldn't have helped anyone, least of all Chris. So she'd offered all the support she could and resolutely stuffed her feelings into the recesses of her memory. Dean clenched her empty hands into fists; her inner fires were still raging so high, that she couldn't extinguish them. She closed her eyes and recalled the familiar warmth of that small body leaning into her. The bare skin of their arms and legs touched as they entwined in the sand. Dean groaned at the flash of a fantasy involving Chris, herself and the love scene in the movie *From Here To Eternity*. She closed her eyes feeling her rising need. She still longed to touch her, hold her, and more. Dean reflected as she rubbed her hand back and forth

over her stomach. She grimaced, at the thought of masturbating to quiet the longing. She was almost content feeling the sharp edge of desire waiting in the background. Since the moment they had shared a kiss, she'd felt an unrelenting ache smoldering inside her. Her body trembled at the thought of that night in the park. She had come so close to losing complete control.

Dean grabbed a pillow from the empty side of the bed and smashed it over her head, trying to drown out her sensual thoughts. Eventually, her breathing deepened, as her body wound down falling asleep. Her limbs relaxed further and the pillow slid down as Dean drifted into a dream.

*They were in the park, stopping under a beautifully arching, oak tree. Standing on the precipice, close together in the quiet warmth and solitude. Dean studied Chris, who was staring intently at the swirling waters below, just beyond the edge of the Cliffside.*

*The breeze wafting up from the ocean lifted Chris' beautiful golden hair making her appear angelic as it flowed over her shoulders. Dean stood, transfixed at the ethereal display, jealously watching the moonlight as it touched her, the dress clinging greedily to the curves of her body as the wind pushed it. She felt a rising hunger deep within her soul, a wistful longing and a call that could only be answered by one other person, the other half of her. A mist fell over the area obscuring her, preventing her from viewing of what she wanted.*

*She whimpered in her sleep her hand reached outward. Dean's brow creased as she continued to dream.*

*She stepped toward the cloud to chase her vision, when an otherworldly being began drifting toward her in the fog. She stopped in confusion. It had no solid form, but it was approaching her. "Chris?" She called out, becoming alarmed. "Hello...are you there?" It floated serenely, meandering its way along and coming closer... "Chris? Where are you?" She didn't know how to respond to the manifestation and stared at it blankly, all her senses on alert.*

*"Do I know you?" Dean timidly, queried of the specter as she looked around into the seemingly endless haze. "What are you?" She cried out in surprise, jumping when the thing brushed up against her, stroking her backside. It's touch gentle and feminine.*

*Divinely painting it's caress along her shoulders and down her arms. Something that she could not see continued winding itself around her. Like a cat, wrapping itself around her feet and legs, enveloping her by circling in a winding, smoky path of figure eights. It's supreme warmth encompassing her like a blanket, stilling her fears.*

*A face arose in the mist, Chris' face that was suddenly before her, glowing in its celestial perfection. She was in awe of the apparition, afraid to reach out, lest it should disappear.*

*"I know you." Chris whispered, engulfing Dean in an embrace before fading from site.*

*Dean looked into the blackness, seeking out what had been just out of reach. Yearning for it. When the moonlight and the cliffside with Chris standing near her came back into view, she rejoiced as she looked upon her.*

*Chris must have felt the pull of Dean's gaze as she slowly turned to look upward. The darkness of the night couldn't hide the blue eyes staring hungrily down at her. Dean begged Chris silently to say something, do something, or just give her a sign. Then, the delicate hands were reaching out, basking in the feel of Dean's silk top as Chris slid her fingers across the material. Dean trembled, delighting in the soft touch. She couldn't remember when she had wanted anything so badly before this moment in time.*

*She leaned down and their lips touched, parting and then slowly devouring each other in blissful rapture. Dean released a low growl as Chris' tongue ran across the length of her mouth, teasingly. Kissing Chris was without a doubt, something Dean needed to do over and over again. The taste and heat, the scent and textures roused Dean, sending her closer to the edge of being 'out of control'.*

*Dean bit gently, trapping the invading tongue that was causing her heart to explode in her chest. Chris stood trembling in her arms and sighed softly. The erotic visions racing through Dean's head enflaming her passion, causing it to soar. She released the captured muscle, only to sooth over the silky surface of Chris' tongue with her own. They both hummed in total pleasure at the sensuality of the action.*

*Dean pulled Chris' body toward her, deepening the kiss. She felt them bind together as only lovers can. The petite hands ran up and down her silk shirt as they molded together.*

*Aware that Chris was unfamiliar in the territory of women with other women, Dean moved her hands lower, lightly stroking the softness of Chris' hips and behind. A full caress of Chris' backside cupped in her hands was delicious. A jolt of arousal struck them both as Chris released a deeper moan. Dean turned them slightly and pressed Chris solidly against the tree trunk.*

*A gasp was torn from Chris' throat as Dean spread her attention from the ruby lips, bruised from the flaming embrace of her passions to begin kissing down the side of her neck. The heated rush of pleasure, that Dean felt running through her blood caused her to tremble. She needed to slow down, but she had just begun. Dean's lips and tongue swirled soft, hot patterns over the petite collarbone and exposed shoulder.*

*Filled with longing, Dean lifted the small strap holding one shoulder of the dress in place. The creamy swells of her pale heaving breasts, guarded by the sheerest of gauze material, were wickedly enticing Dean onward. She hesitated, lifting her head and locking ardor filled eyes with Chris'. Dean viewed the hooded gaze that was contemplating her with desire as if she were on the menu.*

*"We shouldn't do this here! We can't just..." Chris panted, even as she thrust her breasts upward toward Dean's mouth. Dean licked her dry, overheated lips in anticipation.*

*She blinked at the green orbs that gave her permission, even though Chris gave a verbal claim that differed. Dean looked at the fierce grip, that Chris had on the silk of her shirt and then back up at the flushed features. Chris was waiting for Dean to deliver. The soft skin of a nearby breast was so tempting, that Dean practically whimpered, as she pulled her closer still.*

*"Blame me. I can't stop this right now." Dean murmured as she leaned down to taste of the luscious flesh being offered. Her fingers swept the small strap to the side and the freed material began to slide, moving downward and uncovering the most beautiful sight. Her tongue helped sweep the remaining edge of the material downward as she sought the hardened nub at the tip. Her homage to its peak was gentle. She drew the nipple inward as her tongue bathed its surface. Such incredible softness now hardened with desire.*

*Dean felt her own wetness pooling as Chris took hold of her short, dark hair in a vice-like grip, silently commanding Dean to continue. Servicing the pale breast with her mouth, tongue and teeth, Dean made Chris cry out, gasping in her excitement.*

*Brushing her thumb across the other nipple, still slightly covered by the dress, Dean was forced to keep her partner from collapsing. Chris' eyes rolled back in her head as she reveled in the new sensations. Her body pressed against the trunk of the tree, held up by Dean's arms, she moved into the caresses arching in pleasure. Dean switched breasts feeling the clasp on her hair tighten. The light flicker of her tongue continued to cause a growing tension in her partner. Dean could feel the taut body that she held becoming more and more demanding. She teased mercilessly, raising both their temperatures higher.*

*Suddenly, Chris began begging. She started telling Dean to touch her. Her voice was raspy, heavily laden with her arousal. She spoke into the night air; moaning heated words of desire. Dean growled in pleasure.*

*"Oh God, Dean. Please...harder. That feels so good! Right there...yes."*

*Dean needed and sought out more of Chris. In her conquest, the light flicking became a sucking motion that drew forth more words of praise and excitement. Dean let a warm hand inch the dress edge upward, intoxicated by the softness of the skin beneath it. The lightest of touches through the silken panties at her heated apex caused Chris to thrust her hips forward.*

*Dean held her upright as Chris panted into the night air. Dean rubbed with a finger against the hardened bundle of nerves at her center, flicking her tongue faster over the sensitive nipple as she brought Chris to orgasm. Suddenly stiffening, Chris held her breath, while her body was exploding in the ecstasy of Dean's arms. Dean pressed solidly against the damp panties and extended the euphoria as long as possible with her touch.*

*"Oh God, Dean." A harsh whisper escaped as Chris collapsed into Dean's arms.*

*"Shhhhh, baby. I've got you." Dean murmured into the silky blonde hair as she gathered Chris closer. "I'm here, Chris. I've got you. I love you!" Dean spoke from the heart. She realized the moment*

*after she spoke what had been said. She felt the rightness of her words.*

*"I love you sweetheart." Dean kissed Chris' hair softly. A slight clutch of small fingers squeezed her back.*

The lovely smile gracing Dean's face spoke volumes as she sighed deeply in her sleep.

Chris spent the first hour of her restless dream world, catching only glimpses of possibilities for her future. The revelation of having told her companion of her childhood years had taken its toll. She kept re-living the hated conversation, with her father, only to wander lost onto an unknown path for survival with the help of her Aunt. The strain of her haunting dream wore her down even further than the daylight hours. She tossed and turned, unable to rest. Her vivid imagination suddenly took her to a remembered moment of importance that had been burned into her synapses.

*Chris made her way past the glass etched, brass handled, double entry doorway of the high roller's casino and blinked at the seeping clouds of smoke escaping. She grimaced at the sight and steered wide on the walkway. The undertones of music playing from within caused a low vibration to be heard. It faded behind as she moved along.*

*She moved through a dense fog bank heading toward the storage cabinet of vests. Stopping near a flagpole and boat container, the cabinet beside her, the full view of the main walkway was blocked. But, her inspection of the vests stopped as she listened to the voices coming closer.*

*"Don't worry, honey. She is having a blast. Right now, she is probably snuggling down into her sleeping bag and falling fast asleep from exhaustion." A woman calmly stated.*

*"I'm not worried about her. I just..." another woman's voice pleaded and then a brief chuckle. "OK, so maybe, I worry too much!"*

*Chris heard them moving down the ramp past her. She turned and watched as Brooke and Georgia walking arm in arm, paused to hug each other. The hug became a sweet kiss as Brooke leaned down to Georgia. What it became from there was something so much deeper. The two women melted together. Chris watched them through the moonlight, as they deepened their connection. Her eyes followed soft hands that began to touch bare skin. She heard*

*the tantalizing sounds of softly spoken sweet nothings as the two lovers shared each other. Chris, standing in the shadows, felt embarrassed to be witnessing the moment as an interloper, but she couldn't ignore the feeling of arousal that fluttered wildly in her stomach, as she watched mesmerized, unable to look away. A soft moan floated in the air and Chris shivered in reaction. She briefly closed her eyes, breathing deeply in response. When she opened them...*

*Brooke and Georgia were no longer visible. Dean and Chris stood embracing strongly. Dean had her hands roaming over the backside of the petite blonde's body and Chris had locked her hands behind the neck of her lover. Chris gasped as she hovered nearby and watched herself in Dean's arms.*

*The vision of Dean holding her in her arms disappeared as she abruptly shifted over into the place of the other Chris and began to gasp for different reasons entirely. The sudden flare of overheated erogenous zones as Dean touched her over and over had her melting. She moaned in arousal as a silken tongue delved into her mouth to seek and plunder for treasures.*

*A cloud of mist swallowed them obscuring her sight. Chris found her body wrapped up against a sharply cold, wet muscled firmness as she clung to Dean's swimsuit clad body. This new vision, showed the sleek muscles of her lover's form and the torturous perfection of someone who was long term physically active. Chris noticed that her own choice of clothing was still her uniform. Oddly enough, the buttons holding her blouse together were still closed and the loving woman she was held by was not attempting to change the circumstance.*

*Chris felt dissatisfaction as she stood kissing and licking salty skin and not able to deepen their embrace.*

*She moaned with frustration, as she was unable to gain any closer contact with Dean. Dean looked down at her and smiled, with a shy and totally sober expression on her face.*

*"I'm yours Chris. When you are ready...I'll be here. I love you."*

*The night air deepened, the roar of nearby waves crashing on the shore had Chris stumbling. Her arms fell empty in the mist. She looked up to find Dean looking directly at her. Chris started to reach out to touch the offered fingers that were being held out to her but darkness fell, closing in on them and sweeping Dean away.*

Chris whimpered in her sleep, her breathing erratic. She held her hand up as she lay sleeping. The darkness billowed upward in her mind and became a fog bank, flowing like the tide. Going with the ebb and flow she rode the current back into her dream.

*She was a light yielding mist, her form liquid she was freedom. Floating over the waters far below, she was drifting alone and silent, with only the crashing waves for company. As she neared the cliffs she saw a woman. A voice called out.*

*"Chris?" "Hello...are you there? Chris? Where are you?"*

*Chris moved nearer as she recognized her heart. Being unable to respond with her voice, she brushed against her, touching her and soothing her distress. The mist surrounded dean, using her gentle touch to stroke her lover, painting her caress along those broad shoulders and down the powerful arms. She wound around her, trying to feel the heat and love, conveying her own in return.*

*Something tugged at Chris pulling her away from Dean. She felt compelled to float away. Her inner fears rose inside? She was helpless to stop it. The mist became rain as she started to cry. She fell.*

*The stars and moon rose to shine brightly across the dark blanket of the sky. Once again, she found herself in the park.*

*They stood together, her smaller form next to Dean's tall, athletic body. They had stopped their stroll under a beautifully arching, oak tree. They stood on a precipice, side by side in the quiet warmth and solitude of the night. Chris studied the swirling waters below, just beyond the edge of the Cliffside. Her dizzied thoughts bounced around from place to place in her mind. Am I here? Is this real?*

*Chris felt the strong pull of the alluring eyes gazing at her, willing her to look back. She turned to look upward. The darkness of the night couldn't hide the blue, staring hungrily down at her. Her gaze was haunted with need. Chris looked at Dean and read the tortured expression. Dean wanted her, needed her. Chris felt the same way. Her delicate hands reached out, basking in the feel of Dean's silk top as she slid her fingers across the material. Dean trembled. Chris watched as Dean leaned down toward her for a kiss.*

*As their lips touched, Chris let her tongue stroke Dean's dry lips. The low growl she heard had her shivering with excitement. Dean caught her tongue and held it with her lips. A sensual caress of the bold tongue from within, had them both moaning in satisfaction.*

*The kiss deepened. She ran her hands up and down the silk shirt wanting to feel skin and touch the flesh of her lover.*

*Chris felt flames of desire shoot through her as Dean reached down and caressed her lower back, sliding those large hands down over her curves and cupping her behind fully. Their bodies merged together in the pleasure.*

*The dance they created as they traded touches and caresses had Chris' mind in a swirl of passion. A lone thought emerged as she felt the tender touches covering her rapidly growing amount of available skin. She wanted so much more; but how much would Dean give her? Trembling with the need and her inability to control her actions she opened her desire filled eyes and looked up at the woman who was stoking her fire higher.*

*"We shouldn't do this here! We can't just..." Chris panted, even as she attempted to thrust her breasts upward toward Dean's mouth. Dean licked her lips and smiled a sultry smile of anticipation.*

*"Blame me. I can't stop this right now." Dean murmured. Chris trusted the guiding hands holding her as she reveled in the love she was given. Her breast was suddenly engulfed into wet heat. She'd never felt such sensations and arched her body into Dean's. Her world was minimized to the smallest of focal points as Dean serviced her breasts with her mouth. She clenched her fingers into Dean's hair and held on tight, silently commanding her lover to continue ravishing her body.*

*Suddenly, she couldn't stop the words pouring out from within. She had to voice her need. She started telling Dean to touch her. She barely recognized her own voice, raspy, heavily laden with her arousal. She spoke into the night air; moaning heated words of desire. Dean growled in pleasure.*

*"Oh God, Dean. Please...harder. That feels so good! Right there...yes."*

*With the way Dean was doing things to her body, she could only hold on and enjoy it. Chris felt a poignant spear of pleasure rushing to her heated core. Writhing, her taut form twitched and jerked as*

*Dean took her over the edge. She stiffened, her breath held, while her body exploded in the ecstasy of Dean's arms. Tears breached her eyes as she gasped...*

*"Oh God, Dean." The harsh whisper escaping as Chris collapsed.*

*"Shhhhh, baby. I've got you." Chris heard Dean murmur. "I'm here, Chris. I've got you." Then Chris heard the words she needed to hear above all others.*

*"I love you!" Dean stated, her deep voice heavy with arousal and passion. Chris managed to look into Dean's eyes and saw the truth of the words. She felt a tear slide down her cheek as Dean reiterated her feelings. "I love you sweetheart." Dean kissed Chris' hair softly.*

With those lovely words woven into her dream, spoken with such sincerity, she turned in her sleep voicing her need.

"Oh Dean..."

Finally, she found a comfortable spot on her bed and managed to relax into a regenerating sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dean was up just after midnight working earnestly to keep the boat on schedule, clearing port authority to tugboat them back out into the ocean. A long jaunt across the Gulf of Mexico would have the ship anchoring off the eastern coastline of Mexico near the small island of Cozumel.

*De Isla Cozumel* is a relaxing, laid back vacation spot that catered to the diving and or snorkeling tourist for its fabled coral reefs. The limestone shore is surrounded by year round temperate, crystal clear water, which ranges from stunning turquoise to deep indigo.

Cozumel is located 12 miles, off of the southern coast of the Yucatan, just across from Playa De Carmen, on the mainland. The unspoiled, white sandy beaches and crystal-clear Caribbean waters along with the nearby, 'world of the mayan' in Playa De Carmen, make this stop an unbeatable, other worldly experience.

The arrival of the cruise liner was unexceptional as they anchored off the island and would move to the International Pier, later in the day. The tender service to and from the town dock began immediately, with boats running every forty minutes or so. By now, six days into the 10-day cruise, the ship's staff was running much smoother and a growing confidence could be seen. The departing passengers smiled and waved to the boat personnel, who worked with the shuttles as vacation friendships were formed. The holiday depression of after Christmas blues was practically unseen. Everyone had received his, or her holiday gifts of being on the exceptional cruise with friends, or family. Smiles were hard pressed to disappear.

Dean caught sight of Chris restocking the warning pamphlets of safety issues listing the known Mexican concerns of poor water quality and sewage problems. She felt a heat flow through her body as she remembered her dream. Not even trying to resist it, she answered by heading toward the siren's call and prepared to ask her to breakfast.

Chris felt the small hairs on her neck tingle with warnings, that she was being watched. Her pulse increased as she looked over her shoulder to see the Captain approaching. Trying not to sink into a puddle of arousal, she finished with the pamphlets and turned to greet her gorgeous hunk of uniformed woman.

"Good morning, Parker." Dean oozed charm and something entirely sensual at the same time. Chris swallowed with a suddenly dry throat. She nodded her head and drowned in twin pools of electric blue. Someone was definitely charismatic this morning.

"Would you like to join me on the island this morning. I have a stop to make with the Port Authority and I would like to take you to breakfast?" Dean smiled at her favorite Officer. Chris, still silent, glanced up shyly at the Captain and grinned. Her tiny nod was all the answer Dean needed to display a full grin of pleasure at the 'Top'.

A staff member, who needed clarification on some unclear instructions that he had been given for the changing of the holiday decorations taking place, briefly interrupted them. Chris answered the question quickly and then looked over at Dean.

"Let's go. We will have to wear our uniforms. I am required back on the ship by 10:30 for a maintenance review."

Dean tucked her girlfriend's hand into the crook of her arm and walked them both back to the boat launch.

They took the shuttle into the small town of San Miguel. The island was basically a tourist stop and full of business dedicated to the tourist trade. Dean didn't even

hesitate to look around. She carefully guided her precious companion through the milling crowds and passed under the Welcoming Arch to head to a taxi stand. They caught a readily available taxi and Dean instructed the driver to head to *Presidente Inter-Continental, Cozumel*. In flawless Spanish she spoke to the islander of the latest news for the island. He rapidly fell under her charm and offered his services for the return trip. Dean arranged a pick up from the taxi driver and slipped him a nice tip as the ride ended and they departed.

As they were entering the five star luxury hotel, the sharply dressed entry bellhops pulled open the gold trim glass doors and ushered the two Officers inside. Obviously knowing the layout, Dean led them around the entrance lobby to a dining area called *El Carabeno*, 'The Caribbean' in Spanish. This large, poolside open arena of patio dining was an exquisitely designed effort to incorporate the breezy outside environment of the ocean along with a five-star quality. The Mediterranean flavored beach design was enhanced by the marimba music floating in the air. The food was considered the highest quality of the island.

Dean spoke of the delicious omelet varieties and selections available, such as Green and Red Tomato, asparagus and mozzarella, or maybe, the Zucchini Blossoms, with *Huitlacoche*, and *Chihuahua* cheese. Some of the dishes sounded mouth watering. Chris found her taste buds anticipating the foreign refreshment of a Spanish Sausage, Manchego cheese and arugula omelet. Dean said, that she had tried them all at one point, or another and casually, let slip, the information that she had been in port here more than once, while in the Navy.

As Dean pulled open the entry door to the dining area, when Chris noticed an all too familiar couple, already waiting inside the entry. Brooke and Georgia, along with Brandy in tow, were seated on a bench in the resting area for waiting patrons. The restaurant was extremely busy and smelled divine. Dean walked over to greet the women and ruffle the hair of her munchkin friend. Chris smiled, slightly embarrassed, as she immediately remembered her spying on the sensual kiss during their stroll to the Casino, that one night. She noticed as the sharp-eyed Georgia, gave her an appraising look. Chris only managed to look down shyly in response. She couldn't believe, that she was so immature sometimes. She felt like she had been caught sneaking into the fridge for a midnight snack.

The child unit of the group was extremely happy to see the Captain and voiced her approval of them all eating together. Brooke winked at Chris and Dean and nodded her acceptance.

"Would you two like to join us for breakfast? We have already requested a booth and a booster chair. We can easily share.

Dean regarded Chris silently and Chris nodded.

“Thank you, Brooke. We would love too.”

Twenty minutes later, the five individuals were seated and paired. Brandy sat in the only chair at the end of the table while Dean and Chris sat on one side of the booth, Brooke and Georgia the other. Amazingly enough, the two blondes regarded the table's occupants and then looked at each other, nodding in total agreement that it was perfect. Chris stifled a giggle at Georgia, as she asked Brooke and Dean, if they could handle the "minor." She said this teasingly, while she made quoting motions in the air with her fingers.

Brooke dryly assured her that there wouldn't be any problems at her end of the table. Dean relaxed, with the bantering pair and kept up a child to adult conversation with Brandy.

“Did you like your Christmas presents?”

“Yes” Brandy's eyes gleamed with excitement.

“I go...t...ttt a d...d...doll and a b...b...bboat just like your bb...bb...oat.” Dean smiled at the little sweetie.

“I even c...cc...an go in the baf tub with it. It floats.” Brandy clapped excitedly.

The waiter arrived to take their drink order and deliver the menus. Dean and Brooke got into a quick discussion of the omelets. And Georgia flipped through the child's menu she had asked for. The waiter provided Brandy with a 4-color crayon set and a sketching sheet with cartoon characters on it.

“How bout some scrambled eggs with waffles on the side, with a lot of syrup?” Brandy danced in her seat and smiled happily. Chris watched as Georgia ran her hand over her partner's arm and pointed to the selection, she wanted ordered for Brandy, even while Brooke nodded and ripped open the crayon package and handed one to her daughter. The well-oiled partnership was obviously running smoothly. Chris wondered when Brandy came into the fray and how?

“So where are you two from?” Dean asked, her curiosity finally able to be satisfied.

“New Orleans. I originally moved down from Philadelphia, PA. I was hired as a prosecution lawyer for a firm down in the Big Easy. She...” Brooke tilted her head, quirking a dark eyebrow toward Georgia's suddenly quiet form, “...was already residing there.” An exaggerated pout graced Georgia's lips as Brooke halfway turned toward her in the booth.

Catching the pout, Brooke smiled broadly at her wife, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes. She seemed about to say something, but refrained. Georgia just sighed heavily and rolled her green eyes heavenward.

“Yes, I’m originally from Georgia!” She grimacing at the snicker Brooke made her eyes narrowing at her mate. “I had to migrate out of the state to save my sanity before the last train left.” Brooke snickered again and casually turned back to Brandy, leaning over to look at her daughter’s talented scribbles of purple, ‘ooohing’ and ‘ahhhing’ in total fascination. Georgia rolled her eyes and poked Brooke hard in the ribs. Brooke jumped in reaction and laughed as she turned back toward her woman.

“What, dear? I was not going to say anything! You’re not even on my mind!” Brooke turned to Dean and stage whispered, “Don’t rile her up or all the lights might go out!” Brooke kept an incredibly innocent expression on her face, staying sober even while Dean and Chris laughed. Georgia frowned, nodding slowly and narrowing her expressive green eyes at her wife. She leaned over and whispered into Brooke’s ear, “No peaches for you!” Brooke’s blue eyes widened in exaggerated alarm at the punishment Georgia implied.

Dean and Chris both grinned and tried not to laugh. The two had obviously, dealt with this story a time or two. Chris wondered how many times Georgia had repeated that information. What a horrible thing for a parent to name her child! She thought as she giggled at Brooke, who was amazingly maintaining a stoic expression, playing the innocent party. She admired the obviously strong connection between two women as they moved with each other recognizing silent signals from each other. Maybe, if she just paid more attention, she could pick up a thing or two.

The waiter returned bringing a carafe of orange juice, a pitcher of ice water and a hot pot of coffee, with four cups. He poured out the drinks as the women ordered. His questions of what and how were to the point. He had the orders memorized and was away within moments.

Dean and Chris, both drank their coffee black and watched silently as Georgia and Brooke, both used cream with sugar. After everyone had enjoyed the first sips of the Columbian coffee, the conversation continued.

“So how long have you two been together?” Dean asked sipping her freshly delivered coffee. Chris watched Brooke soften and smile with tenderness as she took Georgia’s hand in her own. Kissing the palm she had captured, she winked at Dean.

“We will be sharing our ten year anniversary at midnight on New Years Eve.” Dean and Chris congratulated them. “You’re invited to the party. The world will be celebrating it with us.” Brooke and Georgia looked at each other in adoration.

“How did you two meet? Are you a lawyer too?” Chris wondered aloud as she spoke to Georgia. Georgia laughed and then sobered quickly, shivering in mock fear.

“Not even close, darling. I was, at the time, involved with someone who shall remain forever a bad memory.” Georgia sniffed and frowned. Brooke chuckled and took up where Georgia left off.

“She was married, when we met. She came to hire a divorce lawyer.” Chris’ eyes widened in surprise, Dean quirked her own dark eyebrow as a thousand questions sprang to mind. Brooke continued.

“I had just arrived the week before and was temporarily working in the office next to Billy ‘The Shark’ Dalton, a divorce lawyer in our establishment. I saw her walk into the building and instantly sighed at what a waste it was, that the lesbian community was missing out on such a beauty. I eavesdropped shamelessly as I listened to Georgia tell ‘The Shark’ she had married for the wrong reasons. That’s when he shut the door.” Brooke lamented as she whined over being cut out of the conversation. Georgia slapped her lightly on the arm, chuckling at her pitiful expression.

Georgia took a quick look to see if Brandy was involved in her coloring before she picked up where Brooke left off. Her voice was lowered as she continued. “I was just telling ‘The Shark’, that I had married for the wrong reasons, at the wrong time and with absolutely, the wrong sex. My husband and I were a complete disaster as a married couple. I was a totally dominating B...I...T...C...H and he had the wrong equipment. When I first walked into the lawyers office, I noticed Brooke right away and thought...” she lowered her voice even further from Brandy’s hearing”...‘Oh my God! Dress her in a little leather and what my whip could do for her!”

Georgia grinned as she watched Brooke turn red with embarrassment. Satisfied her wife was paid back for her teasing earlier; she looked back over at Dean and Chris.

“Three nights later, we ran into each other at an all women’s crowded bar. She was wearing her favorite leather jacket and I couldn’t restrain her fast enough. I pinned her against a wall and used my ‘oh so southern’ charms. I had her trapped before she could make her escape.” Georgia eyed her tall lover and blew a brief kiss her way. Brooke turned more crimson as the other three women smiled.

Chris came out of her shell a bit, when Brooke inquired how long Dean and she had been a couple. She bit her lip and then looked over at Dean. Dean looked back smiling.

“We are still in the dating stage as of yet. We have only known each other for...” Dean looked down at her watch. “About six days.” She chuckled as Chris grinned back. Brooke and Georgia congratulated them both on their newfound happiness. Dean took the attention away from the still new relationship and mentioned that she was previously in the military, with the Navy. Brooke and Georgia asked a bunch of questions after that concerning the ‘gays in the military policy’ and Dean’s view from an officer’s position. Chris mostly listened unless asked a direct question.

Dean loved to chat with the youngest member of the group periodically to try and include her in the conversation. Brandy ate it up. Dean had become her hero.

“That’s very pretty, Brandy.” Dean encouraged the child as she watched her color the sheet with more and more purple spots. Brandy smiled.

“I like to color. Mommy says its her arrr..tistic..bluejean.” The adults laughed and Brooke smiled delightfully at her daughter.

When the food arrived the four women were laughing and joking like old friends. Chris managed to observe every touch Georgia made toward Brooke. She was silently cataloging, how she could act in her new relationship. The two women across from her were a great source of information just from their actions.

The waiter carefully passed over the huge plates of food and provided various types of syrup, along with a butter tray and various types of jelly spreads in glass designer jars. The women and child spoke praises at each culinary delight that was delivered.

The omelets were delightfully colorful with various species of peppers on the side. The platters were designed to entice the eyes and attract the stomach. Chris wasn’t the only one to moan in appreciation from the aroma. The group began to eat and exclaimed their approval repeatedly as they dined in the bright sunshine of the Mexican owned island sitting near the equator.

Dean glanced at her watch and frowned as she eyeballed a few smudged spots on her white sleeve. Everyone’s meal had been demolished and satisfied grins were apparent. Brandy had eaten half of her two-waffle stack and thoroughly played in the scrambled eggs. Her plate was a mess and she was happily riding the sugar high as she sat chatting with herself and whoever would listen. Dean discovered the different look of smeared grape jelly on her shirtsleeve from that of sticky smeared syrup on the buttons as she listened to Brandy discuss her two mothers. Momma Georgia winced in Dean’s direction as she pointed out one other smudge of unknown sticky markings near the edge of her cuff. Mommy Brooke rolled her eyes and quickly checked out her own clothing for any stray foodstuff.

“Momma said we might get a d...d...dd...og when we get back home. Course it can't be a chewa...chew ...small d..dog. Mommy want's a great b..big..ole Shepard. She tole me so.” Brooke snickered at Georgia's growl.

“That so?” Dean nodded; fascinated with the little ones continuous chatter as she lifted her coffee to sip the rich brew. There was a very quiet pause in the conversation, as Brandy required air and the four adults relaxed with each other to enjoy the satisfaction of a great meal.

“I've been r..r..real good too.” Brandy commented in the quiet. “I haven't had a spanking in a long time. Brandy looked down at her plate and sighed the dramatic sigh of a five year old. She wanted more coloring space.

“I'm done momma. I don't like these green peckers and they have cat syrup all over them!”

Dean's eyes widened and she coughed on the mouthful of coffee. Drops sprayed across the table onto Brooke, in reaction to the surge of laughter spilling out of her. She coughed through an apology, as she handed various napkins toward Brooke.

Brooke looked over at her daughter then turned back to her wife. Georgia was rolling with laughter.

That's peppers and ketchup, Brandy.” Brooke sighed as she listened to her wife snicker and laugh.

“God I love that child!” Georgia wiped a tear from the side of her eye as she tried to control her laughter. She took one look at her partner and lost it again. Brooke had coffee dripping down from her hair and off her chin.

Brooke didn't know whether to be embarrassed, mad, or laughing hysterically, like her wife seemed to be. Georgia pushed her out of the booth and hiccupped to a halting laughter as she pointed toward the restrooms. Take your daughter and clean yourselves up in the restroom.” Dean stood up too.

“I'll help Brooke. I'm sorry! She just caught me by surprise. I just...” Dean suppressed another fit of laughter as her eyes met with the other woman's and saw the coffee spatters on her face. Brooke just rolled her eyes at the entire fiasco.

“My wife left those peppers on her plate on purpose, I'm sure. She knows that Brandy, won't pronounce that word right.” Dean looked back at evil green eyes that were twinkling with laughter. Georgia's blonde eyebrow rose in challenge as she chuckled still. Dean laughed and just shook her head.

“I need to see if I can get this cat syrup off my sleeve anyway! Isn’t that right Brandy?” Dean chuckled, smiling down at the child as they moved away.

The two taller women held a hand each for Brandy as the trio moved through the tables and customers toward the bathroom.

Chris watched them go until a serious tone of voice turned her head with an abrupt interrogation.

“What are you doing?” Georgia asked frowning.

Chris looked over in surprise.

“Umm..what? What are you talking about?” She hedged.

“You’re staring at Brooke and I and it’s making me feel ...on edge! What is the problem?” Georgia asked directly, waiting patiently for Chris to explain.

Chris sighed. Caught at being an oogler. Damn! She frowned in defeat and laid it on the table for Georgia.

“I’m new at this relationship thing and I was watching for pointers. I was hoping to be able to use some good tips on Dean. I am just not experienced in...stuff!” Chris winced at her lame words. Surprisingly, a mirthful expression crossed Georgia’s face as she grinned back at Chris. Chris blew a puff of air upward to move a tuft of hair from over her eyes as she watched a wicked looking gleam enter Georgia’s eyes.

“You need tips huh? I’m good for those. I won’t give you the hard stuff. I know a few moves you can try on Dean. So you two haven’t really...uhhh...” Georgia’s perfectly arched eyebrow rose in question and Chris blushed, shaking her head.

“Although that is high on my list of things to do.” She mumbled under her breath as Georgia laughed fully and with gusto at hearing the remark. The two women were deep in conversation, when the dark haired trio returned. The two tall women eyed the innocent looking green eyes and looked over at each other frowning.

“We are so in trouble!” Brooke spoke to Dean. Dean just nodded carefully.

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**Disclaimer:**

1. **Copyright:** These are all my characters. Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Nope, uh uh.

3. **Sexual content:** Hey...there is some serious seducing happening here! Chris has gone a bit wild. Sex is involved.
4. **Special thanks:** to my online friends who I bounced idea's off of...course they were looking for early releases of the story but...it still helped (the scammers). Plus I think I need to mention I borrowed a few songs. Ummm...just for the story not for like publishing or anything or whatever. Get real...what else is music for? Sweet Surrender (Sarah...duh) Unforgettable (duh who else but Nat and Natalie)
5. **Language:** S\*\*T and maybe a B\*\*\*H or something like that.

## Deepest Ocean Green Part 7

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry, Cape Canaveral we will sail to Miami, Key West Island and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale, then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

Chris found her thoughts careening toward Dean with more and more frequency as Georgia filled her head with subtle moves and techniques to attempt her seduction of Dean. When the two serious women had finally gotten down to the brass tactics, Chris found Georgia's strategy to be subtle and yet, fascinatingly persuasive.

She was amazed at the information the southern woman began to pour out during their brief conversation. Georgia began listing, the seven southern rules for getting what you want. Thank god, that Chris had total recall and quickly embedded the list into her memory. Although she thought they sounded very common, she decided she would analyze them later. As Georgia stated the finer points, Chris began to worry. She would have to do some research in order to learn the answers to some of the suggestions. Chris smiled as she thought about how enjoyable getting that information might be. She listened to Georgia rattle off all the rules.

"I will explain my seven southern belle rules and then, 'you too', can pretend to be from the south." Georgia laughed lightly at her own humor.

"First you need to look like a million stars. Be perfectly adorable and yet, have a cutting edge too, be sexy. Leave that one button undone, that you continuously button up. Oh! Wear dainty jewelry. The rule is really just jewelry, but for you make it dainty. My cousin's unique style of jewelry is to show her exotic tattoos through different holes in her t-shirt. Whatever works for the individual huh?" She took a breath, contemplating.

"Second, wear a perfume. I don't care if it's soap with wild flowers...just wear it. Your lover will thank you later. It's one of those hidden pleasures...you already

know this, but...your only familiar with the phrases...don't eat onions before you go out on a date. Damn shame really...onions are so good! However, the aroma two hours later can pretty much turn off the love connection. But, wear a perfume and it can titillate the senses, making you unforgettable."

"Third, bring flowers or food. Any girl will love both. The rule is tried and true. Flowers melt the heart, no matter how butch and food is the ultimate gift to share later, while making love. Can't lose on either one. Chris nodded politely, as her mind reeled with the incoming information. Specific food choices are totally up to you. Try finger foods for a fun night."

"Choose a romantic setting." Georgia reminisced about her own experiences. "Brooke took me to the state fair and we had such a great time. We rode the ferris wheel and went from booth to booth. Lord, we must have drained her bank account getting those really neat stuffed animal trophies. I just loved it. Then she drove me out to a scenic rest area to look at the stars and moon. If that cop hadn't been walking around I might have jumped her. It is all about the person and how well you know them. Romantic can mean a closet, if its done right!" Georgia chuckled and Chris laughed.

"Picking the perfect music is a must, if you're able to arrange it. Music is the best aphrodisiac, other than alcohol, but I'm assuming you want her to be aware of the experiences. Stick with the music selection you know she will love. Find a happy medium between you both. You will want to be able to stand it when you're necking or more."

"Ah, dancing, the sixth sinful treat of the southern belle rules. My mamma, God rest her soul, always said dancing was just one step from vertical to horizontal. She was so right. Two bodies pressed together, listening to music, feeling a pleasure of senses. It's an important erogenous experience that should be enjoyed thoroughly. Take your time and do it right. Let the entire song play through. Listen to her soft sighs and feel the trembles. God, what a rush!" Chris watched, Georgia pull back in the booth and shake her head at the intensity of her memories. Georgia smiled and winked at Chris.

"I am thinking there is a nap in store for one little angel today. Her mother had better be prepared." Chris smiled and blushed at the implications of what Georgia, was so forthright in blatantly explaining to her.

"Don't forget the last 'must do'. Your lover has particular spots on her body that crave attention. And no, I'm not talking about the obvious one. Just remember to enhance the entire seduction to touch the major sensitive spots with a soft caress or more. Try light scratches on the back of neck, focus attention on her ears, lots of soft kisses on the lips and maybe stroking her legs. Lovers forget that the love isn't all about having that wham, bam and thank you ma'am feeling. Slow it down and enjoy it."

Both women felt their respective partners returning, even without looking. As if they had a sixth sense, they both found themselves relaxing from the stress of the separation and feeling more alive since the departure of the two. Georgia turned her head, just as Chris did. Two sets of emerald green searched the restaurant for their nearing partners.

Chris just had time to thank Georgia and get a wink in return from her new friend before Brandy came barreling back to the table to climb into the booth and hug Georgia. Her freshly scrubbed features, pink with health, were full of trusting innocence. Her dark eyes shone with excitement. The two blonde women listened with fascination as Brandy described the bathroom full of seashells and pretty soaps.

Her two escorts were not far behind and walked up to the table as Georgia asked if Brandy used the soap. Brandy nodded and scrambled out of the booth to get back to her chair. With the green crayon she had found on the table next to Brooke's coffee mug, she picked up her purple spotted cartoon page and started adding the new color. Brooke slid into the booth next to her wife and reached under the table to rest her hand on Georgia's thigh.

Dean also slid into the booth and grimaced as she glanced at her watch.

"We have to be off. I have so much enjoyed the morning ladies. Thank you." Dean smiled, charming everyone at the table with her sincerity. Georgia, Brooke and Brandy said their goodbyes as Dean and Chris departed. Teasingly, Brooke noted that they would all be seeing each other on board the Love Boat. Dean and Georgia groaned. Chris just blushed. Chris gave Georgia a quick hug and waved at Brooke, as Dean was shaking Brooke's hand. The two uniformed women walked side by side out of the restaurant and hotel, getting noticed by several patrons. Their striking differences of contrasting light and darkness, along with the easy companionship between their bodies as they walked in synch, had more than one person looking twice. The two women left in the booth watched as well and commented to each other in low voices.

"They are perfect together. Right?" Brooke just nodded in response to her wife's comments and turned to stare at her own beautiful blonde. Georgia, was the one she could watch for hours. She knew, that she was always telling a white lie, when she teased her wife about "not being on her mind". The wonderful woman was always on her mind and Brooke was extremely happy to know it!

Dean and Chris taxied back to the dock and caught an available shuttle boat to take them to the ship. Chris kept looking over at Dean with curiosity. She wanted to start asking questions right away, but found that she didn't know where to start. *What kind of music did Dean enjoy? What was her favorite color? What are her favorite foods? Will she like my tastes?* At that thought, Chris' mind went

into the toilet as she imagined exactly what tastes Dean might like. Oh the ideas on what she could do with her newfound knowledge. As she imagined, her body tightened with excitement and she blushed bright red. *God I need to work off some of this sexual tension*, Chris thought. Trying not to show her extremely erotic thoughts to the world, she looked down at the swiftly passing waters as they rode the shuttle. Dean looked over to find her 1st Officer blushing profusely.

Dean instantly wondered what had gotten into Chris. *'Just what did I miss at that table anyway?'*

The shuttle slowed to dock at the shipside-floating pier and allow the passengers to step out of the boat.

“Are you alright?” Dean asked as she helped Chris step from the boat to the ship’s docking ramp. Chris just nodded and gave her a sheepish grin.

“I have seven hours to kill before I get back to the helm. Would you care to join me at the gym? I feel like, I could use a good work out. Maybe we could work together on some treadmill sessions, or weights? Chris wondered for the umpteenth time, if Dean was able to read her mind. She nodded, grinning in response to Dean’s offer.

“Sounds great, Captain. I’ll catch ya there in an hour or so.” Chris grinned. Dean nodded, smiling and they moved up the walkway to return to their cabins. They moved together side-by-side, periodically, their arms brushed against each other in tandem, almost connecting. Chris felt a warm rush of happiness flow through her as Dean reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze goodbye. They parted at Chris’ door and Chris watched the dark haired beauty stride down the hall to enter her own cabin. She sighed. Shutting the door after Dean disappeared, Chris ran across the room to fly into the bed, her uniform be damned. She had a major crush on one hot, dark, exciting lady officer. *Lord!* She wanted to find a bedroom and seduce the hell out of her boss. *Was this normal?* Chris shook her head into the pillows and hoped that she would survive the tension.

Pushing her highly excited body off the bed, she looked over at her dresser and wondered, where that skimpy spandex outfit was stored. *And don’t forget the perfume and lipgloss!* Chris chuckled at her resourcefulness. Soon she would be all ready to go “sweat”. Glancing at her watch, she noticed, that she had only 45 minutes until she had to be at the gym.

Exactly forty-five minutes later Dean stepped onto the treadmill and punched the button. The incline rose to 12% as she started to walk. Her shorter blonde companion, decided to keep the 4% incline on the tread next to her. Dean tried, without success, not to stare at that gorgeous body wrapped in a painted leotard. Chris tried not to swallow her tongue at the muscular arms flexing beside her as

they walked along. They both began moving in purposeful steps, along the revolving path, with matching determined expressions. The white cords of the portable headphone set were inserted into the techno phonics of the treadmill's music system. The women began running, music was blasting as they marched onward.

Chris knew she was on the right track, no pun intended, as she noticed the channel displayed on the treadmill radio that Dean was listening too. She switched over and felt the rhythm pulse into her ears. The vocals of Sarah rushed through her as she paced with the music.

You take me in no questions asked  
You strip away the ugliness that surrounds me  
Are you an angel, am I already that gone  
I only hope that I won't disappoint you  
When I'm down here  
On my knees

And sweet  
Sweet  
Sweet surrender  
Is all that I have to give

An hour later, both women were feeling the burn. They agreed on a cool down period and began walking slower and slower, until they eventually stepped off the treads. Both looked exhausted and grinned with the pleased pain that they'd endured. On many levels, Dean thought that the gym was a plethora of sexually oriented, torture devices. Now she knew, it was also for relieving frustrations. She looked over at the bench press and wondered if a few sets of lifts would help with the workout.

They both went on to other machines and without knowing, each kept the other within her sight. It wasn't that difficult as Dean was lifting free weights, while Chris worked at the circuit machines. After another hour, they both hit the showers. Completely refreshed Dean was combing her short damp hair, when she glimpsed the shower curtain behind her billowing out from the heated spray within. The scant instance of seeing some naked skin, had Dean wishing she was back on the treadmill again. Her blood pressure and body temperature rose sharply as her imagination filled up with thoughts of one naked, blonde, 1<sup>st</sup> officer bombshell.

Dean growled at her wasted, two-hour gym workout as she felt her body tightening up again with a heated tension. She smiled at herself in the mirror and that lop sided grin smirked back. *Not totally wasted. I did get to watch Chris stretch and bend and contort in that spandex goddess outfit.*

Chris stepped out of the shower; with a towel wrapped around her and looked over to see Dean, smiling at herself in the mirror. She grinned at the woman and just shook her head. *'Some people are totally nuts. What the hell is she thinking about that would make her grin so goofy?'*

Dean turned at the motion from behind her and her gaze locked with Chris'. *'Oh my, my!'* Chris swallowed at the visual connection.

Dean's goofy look became more serious. She sensually ran her eyes over Chris' body following down past the towel, to her feet and then back up. Blue eyes burned a trail across the already warm skin. Chris stood still in shock, holding her towel and bathroom bag against her body. The intense workout that had relieved her stress, seemed to be destroyed as her muscles tightened once again, in response to that primal gaze. Feeling a blush climbing higher, Chris licked her dry lips, rushing from the bathroom into the locker area. She threw on some sweats and a t-shirt and added as many defenses as possible. Her running shoes were becoming a must. *'God, that woman had some magnetism.'* "Grrrrr," Chris growled with frustration as she dressed. A breath of wind touched her damp skin. She shivered knowing Dean was just around the corner.

Chris stood, brushing her hair, when Dean walked into the locker area from the bathroom. They both acknowledged each other with shy smiles.

"I'm off to work in a few hours. I might go rest before my shift. I'll see you tonight, right?" Dean asked as she gathered up her gym bag full of items from the locker, that she'd procured earlier.

Chris nodded and thought of a hundred things, which she could be doing as first officer and none of which, would take her mind off Dean. She was going to have to sit down and make a plan. She needed a little time. *'When would be a perfect time to seduce the Captain? O' Captain! My Captain!'*

"I'll see you later. We can eat dinner together. Thanks for the lovely day, Dean." Chris moved closer to the taller woman. She looked up at the Captain and quickly brushed a kiss across the angular jaw. Dean looked down at Chris and smiled brightly.

"My pleasure."

An hour later, Chris searched through her CD's and found one that she thought, would be the perfect music for a sweet seduction. Her mind spun, with the aggressive attitude she was using. She couldn't believe she was doing this. Sitting at her desk, she jotted down ideas and dismissed any niggling thoughts of failure. Everything would be perfect. She nibbled on the tip of the pen she was using and grinned with excitement.

Five hours later, well rested and feeling sated from the dinner that the two women were sharing at one of the on board restaurants, Dean headed back to take over her shift in the tower as the night fell.

Chris had seemed a bit preoccupied, but otherwise extremely cheerful and full of innocent flirtatious moments. She explained how much she'd enjoyed her day. From the morning breakfast they had shared, through her afternoon workout, and the scrumptious dinner they'd eaten. Dean had enjoyed the cheerful and relaxing conversation, even while internally rolling her eyes at her own rendition of the afternoon workout. She'd wound up spending almost all of her nap tossing and turning over the picture of her diminutive 1st officer, dressed in that snug little spandex outfit.

Now as she entered her control tower and accepted the clipboard to begin her shift, she stood over the massive amount of controls on her midnight shift and sighed heavily. She looked out at the ocean and the crystal clear, evening sky. The moon shone down, leading the ships bow in it's glowing trail. The stars were twinkling in a blanket of black velvet, reflecting like diamonds on the obsidian waves. Pearly white gossamer reflections lit up the ocean night from millions of miles, through the blackened space above.

The low-lit tower room, displayed its minute-by-minute updated course, through the green and red glowing panels. The reflection of which, lit up the glass as Dean looked out. It was a kaleidoscope of red white and green, a true holiday coloring. She couldn't stop the smile as she steered the ship onward. She decided to ask Chris if a slight stay in Miami, could be arranged after the cruise ended. Only four more days until their final destination was reached and only four more days until the New Year arrived. Dean was looking forward to discovering, what both the ending and the new beginning, might bring.

The night passed and the ship was scheduled to be on course spending the majority of the next day out on the ocean. It's evening destination was a Bahaman stop for the later hours of the night to enjoy and celebrate an early New Year, with Bahaman style. The official celebration had already started in the Bahamas. However, the capital island of Nassau had a lively national festival called a Junkanoo. Starting the day after Christmas, thousands of revelers descend on Bay Street dressed in elaborate costumes and danced wildly, throughout the night and into the early morning. The revelry continued for the entire week until New Year's Day and ended that night.

Tanner Industries had passage and docking privileges prearranged on the main island of Nassau, one of the 700 Bahaman cays, allowing the passengers a chance to experience a national tradition of celebrating the New Year. The ship would be at the port, docking in the early evening. The main festivities would be held in Rawson Square, where the music, international foods, costumed street revilers and international exotic atmosphere would be available for the tourists.

The cultural effects would be a constant on going celebration until well after New Year came in at the stroke of midnight.

Dean headed back to her cabin, only to feel a second wind strike her. Not feeling the least bit tired, she heard the booming explosions of the rifles shooting off the port bow and turned to head in that direction. Only during deep ocean sailing days the skeet shooting became available and it started during the early hours of dawn. She wasn't very surprised to see another tall, dark figure waiting her turn, while some of the small group at the pointed bow took turns with the three available rifles. The bellowed sound of an older mans voice yelled 'pull'. The automatic mechanical 'twang' of a machine shooting the skeet out at a high velocity released off toward the port side. The crisp sound of a rifle shot exploded, once again, into the air. The rhythmic fourth step was usually a distant crack of a clay target smashing to smithereens. The majority of the shooters however, were missing their target. Everyone laughed, or made comments in the friendly atmosphere. A nearby service stand provided hot coffee and some fresh donuts or fruit. It was perfect.

Brooke caught Dean's eye as she rested a good distance away from the direct action at a shooting rail across the wide bow. She stood watching the men fire into the air. The sonic sounding booms of the rifles at close range, left you with a ringing in your ears and your chest tense with the scare, each time the trigger was pulled. Overly loud, the explosion echoed over the water that was hissing below as the ship surged onward through the cresting ocean waves. The men and women standing as far away as Brooke celebrated the recorded miss and hits with 'ooohhs' and 'ahhhs'. Brooke smiled with Dean at the collective reaction from the cheering group.

Dean greeted the lawyer and shook hands with her. Brooke gestured to the steaming brew, ten feet to the leeward side. Dean nodded vigorously as they both walked over to get a cup of fresh java from the stand.

"Gonna try your luck today? The wind's just brisk enough to allow for misses and nobody will blame ya." Brooke stated in challenge to Dean, as she quirked a dark eyebrow toward the broad shouldered captain.

Dean raised her own eyebrows in jest, offering a comically inquisitive response to Brooke's challenge and grinned.

"You do realize, that I've been on these ships for practically my entire life?" Dean commented, as she cupped the warm brew between her two hands. Brooke frowned and winced.

"Oops! Didn't think of that! You may want to take it easy on me. I've survived pregnancy and the attempt of raising a child. I'm an aged version of my younger

self.” Brooke winked playfully. Dean laughed and gestured Brooke over to the shooting gallery.

The two tall dark haired women stepped forward to compete together and right away became an object of interest as they both garnered the attentions of the others.

Obviously, the captain stood out with her uniform, but not only because of its clean white material. Her broad shoulders, tapered waist and rock-solid athletic form portrayed an appealing command. She also exhibited, a readily apparent, powerful charisma that impressed people instantly.

However, Brooke didn't rate to badly, without the uniform. She had worn a black pair of jeans with a casual corduroy button down shirt and a multi-zippered matching black vest. The four pockets were zipped shut, but the style was obviously fashionable and trendy. Her worn pair of cowboy boots was probably the kicker for some of the men. She showed style and good taste. Her own charisma was in competition with Dean's.

Dean was extremely happy, that for once, the attention was not completely on her. Brooke just pumped the rifle after picking it up and held it pointed out to sea steadily waiting for Dean. Dean studied the rifle, pumped it and glanced at Brooke.

“Ready?” Dean asked, watching as Brooke nodded.

They both yelled, "pull" together. Two clay pigeons flew into the distant air. The two women were blurs of action as they raised their rifles together. Almost firing together, the short sound of the two shots boomed into the air. The distant skeet shattered. The crowd shouted with excitement. Dean and Brooke grinned.

The shooting continued. The average round of clays given per turn, per customer, was twelve. After taking the eleventh shot, both women were tied, with ten broken clays apiece. The missed shots did not faze either woman. The twelfth booming shots sounded out as the growing crowd shouted out its glory of the battle. Surprisingly, they both missed. The annoyance on Brooke's face was matched only by Dean's embarrassment as they both stood grumbling at themselves.

“Oh for heavens sake you big babies. PULL!” Georgia's southern accent rang out in the air. The mechanical twang was made and the clay pigeon flew up and away. As it reached it's highest apogee, it continued on and began it's descent into the ocean. Serious shooters usually broke the clay as their target was on the rise. Both Dean and Brooke turned to watch Georgia holding the rifle in her arms watching the target flying further and further out. Just as the impossibility of shooting the clay pigeon was thought to become reality, she raised the rifle and

fired. An indrawn breath of collective surprise was heard as the extremely distant clay target shattered, just before touching the waters.

Georgia lowered the rifle and handed it to the attendant standing nearby. She looked over at the two tall women and shrugged.

“Raised on a ranch and can shoot the whiskers off of a hummingbird at 300 feet. Let's go get breakfast.” She suggested as she waved at the arriving Chris. The two dark headed women glanced at each other and started laughing.

“Thank god for the reality check.” Brooke murmured as she and Dean walked over to the now chatting blondes. Dean nodded and searched for her 1st officer's emerald eyes, needing that connection. She knew, she would always want that connection. She smiled her lop sided smile and watched as Chris blushed so nicely in reaction to her smile. *God! It was good to be the Queen!* Dean smirked internally at the Monty Python, play on words. She felt an incredible rush in just knowing that, she'd put that charming blush on those adorable cheeks.

The ship arrived exactly on time at the Bahaman Island of Nassau and the official unloading of passengers commenced shortly thereafter. Most of the ship was empty and the crew was given permission to go ashore in small groups for a few hours each.

Dean found herself spending the evening hours in her cabin. She had changed into a comfortable T-shirt and slacks. Her bare feet were propped across the ottoman at the foot of her chair. Her dark hair was slightly damp from the shower, she'd taken an hour before. She was looking over some of the reports from the engine room, when she heard a knocking on her door.

Raising her head she uttered, ‘come in’ slightly distracted. Chris stepped into the room and was carrying a food tray. Dean raised a curious eyebrow. She stood up to help relieve Chris of the tray. The food was covered and Dean didn't explore it as she turned back to ask what the occasion was. Her curiosity died as any questions she might have asked, were stolen from the depths of her mind when she saw the beautiful creature standing in her cabin.

The blonde curling hair was arranged just so, wafting upward to accent the slim throat line of her neck. Her light green blouse complemented her darker eyes and was a vee neck, plunging down to hint at the cleavage hiding beneath it. Dean's eyes traveled downward to the tight fitting, cream pants and the dainty sandals. Her eyes flashed in a moment of such desire, that she was shaken from within. Her breathing deepened even as she tried to play it off as nothing. Her strong reaction to Chris had her off balance and her body struggled within, fighting the attraction...which was definitely something.

"I..umm...what...?" Dean coughed to clear her throat of its problems. "What's the occasion Chris? Not that I'm complaining at all. Nope. No complaints here."

Dean's slightly husky tones had Chris smiling. Her first goal had been achieved. She wondered nervously, if the rest of the evening would be as perfect. Reaching out she took Dean's hand in hers and brushed her thumb over the larger knuckles.

"I wanted to spend the evening with you and I thought that now, would be the perfect time. You're not too busy, are you?" Chris said with just a touch of batting her eyelashes for effect. Dean blinked, mesmerized and under Chris' spell. A slow shake of her head and Dean felt herself pulled over to the couch and pushed into it's cushioned surface. She watched as Chris retrieved a CD from under one of the covered plates on the tray and walked over to put it into the stereo.

The selection made, her fingers resting on the play button, Chris took a deep breath and hoped her dreams would become a reality as she started the music.

The first few notes of the song began and Dean smiled. It was a favorite of hers. She looked up at Chris who now stood in front of her and stared at the hand held out toward her. Dean searched the green eyes and saw nervousness and a steely determination.

"Dance with me Dean. Please!"

Dean had no idea what was going on, but with that plea in her mind, she instantly stood and took Chris' hand.

"It would be my pleasure." She murmured, as she wrapped her arms around the smaller woman and held her close. The words of the music floated in the room as the two women floated in a euphoric haze.

Unforgettable, that's what you are  
Unforgettable though near or far  
Like a song of love that clings to me  
How the thought of you does things to me  
Never before has someone been more  
Unforgettable in every way  
And forever more, that's how you'll stay  
That's why, darling, it's incredible  
That someone so unforgettable  
Thinks that I am unforgettable too

Chris lifted her head off of Dean's shoulder and searched above for those blue eyes. Dean looked down and melted into the gaze holding her captive. Chris pulled downward on her neck and Dean obliged willingly, as she brushed her lips across the ones that were waiting below.

Their kiss deepened as they pressed closer together and tried to unite as one. The growing devotion inside both women had been crying to be expressed. They both moaned as the kiss deepened and their tongues entwined. Chris let her hands slide down from the shoulders to rest over the breasts of her soon to be lover. Dean moaned. The kiss broke as Chris rubbed her thumbs over the hardening nipples beneath the T-shirt. Dean looked into the sensual gaze with heavily lidded eyes and trembled as her nipples were pinched. Briefly closing her royal blues, she practically growled as Chris leaned down and bit at one of the nipples through her shirt.

Dean gasped and stammered, "Chris...God what you do to me. Please honey..." Chris hesitated and forced her closed eyes to open and look at Dean. Dean held onto the two smaller forearms. She looked down at Chris and Chris just nodded.

"I want to do so much more Dean. Please! Make love to me?" Dean felt her pulse racing and moved impossibly closer to Chris. "Yes!" Dean whispered huskily. The only answer she could give as she stepped back and moved toward her bedroom suite. Chris followed without hesitation.

They had moved into the bedroom, unhurriedly removing each other's clothing. Chris was not even aware of the fact that she was being somewhat aggressive as she furthered her exploration of Dean's form. She touched bared skin and leaned in to follow with soft kisses. Dean stroked the fire higher as she ran her hands from shoulder to hips along Chris' body Dean turned Chris around, so that the bed was behind her, slowly walking her backward to it's edge and urging her onto it's surface. Chris complied smiling at the trembling larger form still standing at the side of the bed. The vision of Chris naked, lying across the turned down sheets and looking up at Dean, was incredible.

"You are so beautiful, little one. I am almost afraid to touch you."

"Please Dean. Touch me." Chris said, with such a wanton tone that Dean leaned down and kissed her soft lips. She released her lips to move downward. She took a nipple into her mouth's heat and lathed it over and over as Chris writhed in pleasure. Her fingers sought out the wet heat between rigid legs and Chris cried at the first touch. Dean switched to the other breast even as her fingers slid into wetness and rubbed over the bundle of nerves. She stoked the heat with her mouth and moved lower to taste her lover. Chris gripped Dean's shorter hair, guiding her lower, knowing her own body was focusing on that touch. Dean's tongue slid into the blonde's crisp curls and savored the flavor of her passion. She moaned with the exquisite taste and textures. Chris thrust her

hips upward and cried out Dean's name. The raging fire was building to a crescendo. Chris searched for release even as she tried to hold back. Dean fed the fire and felt the all consuming, roaring release breaking loose even as she sucked the bundle of nerves into her hot mouth and brought Chris over the edge. Their spirits soared together as they shared the most intimate moment two women could share. Chris held onto the solid form of her lover as she rode the waves of passion.

The unbelievable sensations were forever stored in her memory and she knew there was so much more to feel, learn and explore. She felt long arms surround her safely guiding her through the pleased haze of her orgasm and she whispered her only available thoughts at that moment.

"I love you, Dean."

Dean gave a strangled cry of surrender and kissed over Chris' face as she gave back the words in return.

"I love you Chris. I always will."

Chris smiled at her lover and reached over to cup a cheek in her palm. Dean held gazes with Chris as they both treasured the moment.

She lay on her back, completely sated, staring at Dean beside her. Dean had propped her head up on one hand and was staring back. The lightly stroking touch of her hands, roaming over Chris' skin and caressing her with long bold motions. The low lighting of the nightstand allowed both women to look upon each other in all their naked glory. Chris finally noticed some of the finer details between the two of them. The obvious contrast to her lighter skin tone from Dean's fully golden tanned body and the much darker cast of features, were extraordinary in her view. The dark hair and deep blue eyes were beautiful. Silken muscles rippled as Dean moved her hand from Chris thigh up over her waist. Chris moaned with longing as she felt the touch of Dean's hand cupping her breast.

Chris was so totally aware, that Dean had not released as she ran a soft stroke of her fingers over the broad shoulders and behind her head to rub over her neck. Dean's nipples tightened in response, while Chris watched. Dean's nostrils flared with the deeper breaths that she couldn't hold back.

The sensitive tremors of the taller woman conveyed a sense of dominating power to Chris. She recognized she had a control with Dean, when it came to making love with her. Chris raked her fingernails over the bared neck once more and something in Dean's eyes sparked into flame. Chris pushed Dean onto her back and feeling her lover comply, she sat up beside her looking down. Dean watched Chris and left her hands at her sides wondering what her new love would do.

“You’re the most beautiful creature, I’ve ever seen. I want to touch you Dean.” She whispered even as she reached out and cupped a breast with one hand. Dean couldn’t control the arching of her back, or the low moan that escaped at the firm touch on her over heated skin. Chris lightly pinched the hard nipple and reached over with her other hand to repeat the touch on Dean’s other breast.

She played with the full breasts and hardened nipples for a few minutes, then was distracted as she noticed Dean’s muscular thighs clenching at each stroke of her hands. She slid her hands down the cut abs and heard Dean’s breath hitch as she neared the dark curling hairs at the apex of her legs.

A quick glance at Dean’s face showed closed eyes and a wrinkle of concentration on her brow. Dean was totally focused on letting Chris control this moment. Chris reached over and dipped her finger into the wetness. She gasped as Dean’s hips arched upward. She let her fingers explore as she touched every ridge and valley. Dean’s legs widened to allow more access and Chris intentionally stayed way from the obvious, hardened clit. She slid her finger down one side of the spread lips only to circle over and slide upward. The entrance to her inner recesses was a bit too much for Chris to explore at this moment. Dean’s low growl was one of many indications, that her touch was driving her wild. The juices flowed and the muscles twitched. Chris leaned down closer to enjoy the sight. She spread Dean’s lips to see the hardened bundle of nerves jutting outward. Dean went perfectly still as she felt the heat of Chris’ breath blowing across her juncture. The innocent tease was beyond powerful. A gush of air was released as a light touch of her tongue stroked over Dean’s clit. Dean tried not to buck at the tremendous sensations. She couldn’t stop herself from reaching over and grabbing the blonde hair on top of Chris’ head. She urged without pressure for Chris to continue.

Chris fell into the taste of Dean as a starving person. She let her tongue stroke over and over. Dean’s muscles became rigid as she felt the rising tension. Chris barely heard the shout of Dean’s release happening above as she sucked and licked running her tongue over the juices and bundle of nerves. Dean grasped the headboard, hearing a creak from the wood as she pressed upward with her pelvis. A second orgasm ripped through her as she bucked in response.

Pulling Chris away from her body she pressed her down into the bed and held onto her with trembling and weakened limbs.

“Chris. Oh my God. Chris.” Dean gasped as she panted through her body’s reactions. Chris stroked the sweaty bangs back off of Dean’s forehead and kissed her face. She savored the smells and flavors of Dean’s essence even as she tasted the salt of her skin. They breathed in each other’s air as they stared at each other. The quiet perfection of their night moved on. They drifted into sleep and held onto each other through the night.

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1. **Copyright:** These are NOT all my characters. Someone else who blah blah you know...owns them. I don't claim them but I like to play with them. OH boy! Play...mmmm mmmm. The rest is all my Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Janice Covington gets attacked by ?? robbers at her dig site...a gun shoots her hat! VERY SEVERE HAT KILLING
3. **Sexual content:** no, soft kisses smooching stuff.
4. **Special thanks:** to my computer who only locked up 12 times. Piece of sh...! And to my beta that actually saved our IM conversation for posterity or something and helped me recover a couple of lost pages from the previously mentioned piece of shi...! Thanks super beta woman (strange habit but...I guess handy).
5. **Language:** No dammit!

**Deepest Ocean Green Part 8**

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral, we will sail to Miami, Key West Island and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale, then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

Chris woke up to the movement of the mattress she was lying on. Her green eyes opened facing the broad shoulders of her lover who was wearing a white tank top. The fantastic night full of love and loving filled her senses. She reached out and ran her hand over the cotton top at the lower back. Her touch stilled the dark haired woman causing the bed to move as Dean turned to capture her hand and raise it to her lips.

"Good morning, my angel. What a wonderful morning it is." Dean's entire expression was one of love, tenderness and hope. Chris blushed and moved closer to tuck her head into the available lap. She was still in awe that she was the cause of that expression.

"God I love you!" Dean murmured as she stroked the golden curls that had gone crazy in the night. Chris felt herself lifted upward, as she was drawn from the blankets and held in Dean's lap. Strong arms wrapped around her and a clean smell of freshly showered skin had her murmuring approval in a sleepy voice. The chuckle that vibrated from Dean was followed by a hug and soft kiss to her forehead. She tucked her sleepy head into that warm neck and closing her eyes wondered what time it was.

"It's only two a.m. I have to take the ship out of dock. We will be on our way shortly to Fort Lauderdale. You need to sleep. Stay here and rest. I'll see you for an early breakfast. We should be docking by 6:30." Chris mumbled a sleepy 'nice' and once again felt Dean chuckle.

"Sleep little one. I'll see you in the morning."

Chris tried to remember what she wanted to ask Dean to do once they arrived in Fort Lauderdale. She just couldn't hold onto a clear thought, exhausted from their loving. She was barely conscious as she was easily lifted and placed back into the bed. The soft pillows had that unique Dean scent as she grasped them in her sleep and pulled them to her body. She curled up into a fetal position and was breathing deeply before Dean was out the door. Dean placed a cold can of O.J. in a cup of ice near the bed and took a flower from her living room arrangement to set it near the O.J. She blew a soft kiss toward the sleeping beauty and she left the cabin.

Six hours later, Chris made her way up to the tower room. Straightening her blazer on her shoulders and removing an invisible piece of lint, she felt a heat warm her cheeks. *Come on Chris. Get a grip.* She scolded herself trying to ignore the nervous fluttering in her stomach. Wiping a trembling hand down her skirt, licking suddenly dry lips, Chris opened the door. She blinked as she looked inside. The incredibly deep blue vista of Dean's eyes stared into her soul as their eyes met across the room. She drew in a shaky breath at the powerful rush, knowing that the woman across the room could touch her so deeply.

Dean left her position at the console and walked over to the beautiful site of her new lover's eyes. The unmistakable glimmer of passion showed in those verdant green orbs. Dean let her eyes slowly roam over the crisp clean lines of her uniform, down to the skirt level. She gave an arched eyebrow and a grin at the sight of beautiful golden tan legs. Dean raised her eyes back upward in time to see a blush suffuse Chris' face. The smile grew wider and Dean leaned in closer.

"Good morning, Top!" Dean said, lovingly.

"Good morning, Captain." Chris smiled, shyly.

They both turned and walked the few feet over to the ever-present coffee pot. Dean retrieved a cup for Chris and handed it to her. Chris ducked her head slightly and felt her smile widen. She just couldn't stop grinning.

"What is on your agenda today?" Dean inquired while signing off on a clipboard that one of the officers handed her. She scrutinized the document briefly, then

handed it back, turning to catch a look of indecision on Chris' slightly frowning features.

"Would you feel up to meeting my Aunt when we get into port? She lives in Fort Lauderdale and is expecting me for dinner. We made arrangements weeks ago after I had received the ships itinerary." Chris drew in a deep breath and held it. She knew she was babbling, but she was nervous with the request.

Dean frowned in thought and nodded affirmatively after a moment.

"I would be honored, Chris. She must be a wonderful and kind woman. I would truly love to meet her."

Chris swallowed the lump of emotion that had sprung up into her throat as she blinked her eyes to hold sudden tears at bay. Dean reached over and grasped her upper arm in a comforting squeeze.

"I'll meet you whenever you'd like. Just let me know." Dean stated softly and Chris nodded.

"I was planning on leaving to go ashore around 6:30pm. She only lives a few miles from shore. We can take my car from the parking garage." Dean smiled and winced slightly as another clipboard was waved in her direction. She motioned the officer over and held the board.

"I'll let you get back to business. I'll see you at 6:30pm. Maybe you'll get to see a little bit of my world." Chris gave Dean a beautiful smile, then turned to replace her empty cup and make her way toward the door of the tower room.

Dean watched the fluid movements of the petite woman and recalled exactly why that sway was present. 'Wow!' Dean mentally drooled.

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The Atlantic Ocean beachside walkway was newly renovated in Fort Lauderdale. Also known as the Venice of America the wide brick walkways, lush landscaping, and a 'wave wall' with neon accent lighting followed the beach for seven long miles. The walkway provided a place for a variety of activities to occur including strolling along the beach, skating, jogging, and biking.

Tourists and residents alike can visit an array of shops, restaurants, sidewalk cafes and entertainment venues on the 7-mile promenade the city had built. Beachgoers can participate in a wide range of activities from boating, wind surfing, jet skiing and volleyball to snorkeling, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing and roller-blading. Also, the morning sunrise was a breathtaking sight over the Atlantic Ocean.

Beyond the walkways, moving into town was Fort Lauderdale's, River walk. Various shops, restaurants, boutiques, museums and the historical district buildings were among many of the businesses included down the New River route of what had been dubbed, 'Florida's most beautiful mile'.

The long term parking garage held four indoor levels of vehicles and Chris led them through the first level to the elevator. The fourth level held her covered ride. As they moved closer Chris clicked on the key set to deactivate the alarm. Dean helped remove the protective cover a huge smile filled her face. She looked over at Chris and wiggled her eyebrows. Chris rolled her eyes. A very sleek white corvette sat waiting for its passengers. The dark leather interior was cool and spotless. The faint scent of Chris' perfume was the only smell Dean noticed as they got in and started the ride.

"This was my first present to myself when I made my First Officer ranking. My aunt told me to go buy something extremely gorgeous and terribly expensive. I think that she thought, I might go buy jewelry. She always just shakes her head and 'tsks' a lot when she sees this car."

Dean laughed and Chris grinned over at her companion. Dean was wearing tight jeans and a clinging blouse made of shimmering silk. Her gold bracelet on her left wrist glittered just like the gold watch on her right. The glint of gold ball earrings sparkled through the thick black hair.

Chris had chosen a nice matching set of Capri cream slacks and a pink blouse with a vee neckline. Her white tennis shoes relayed a Floridian lifestyle even in the depths of December. The weather was breezy and cool, the tourists abundant. They made their way out of the garage and turned onto a busy fairway heading toward the residential areas that were set back, further from the beach's traffic.

Chris drove the car smoothly and Dean stretched out her long legs in the passenger seat. The car was a delight. It gave Dean, a slight insight into a side of her First Officer that she wasn't exactly surprised to see. She knew Chris had always been a fighter and someone who would triumph over the setbacks in her life. She was glad to see that Chris had taken some time to move herself forward in the struggle of recovering from her childhood. Chris had moved beyond the being weak stage in her life of being used and surpassed what was expected of her. She could feel a sense of pride coming from Chris. Dean was grateful that her Uncle had provided a slight helping hand in the guise of Tanner Industries for Chris to use as her stepping-stone to success. The car was justification for the hard work that Chris had performed in her career. Dean was glad that she was able to enjoy it.

Dean frowned as she reflected on her life and realized that she hadn't exactly taken much time to reward herself for the success that she'd accomplished. The

one satisfying creature comfort that she'd bought, had been her SUV and that was something life almost demanded. Her military life had provided her with a home, clothes, travel, and a means of alternate transportation any time she needed. She always seemed so busy with her career and many times she was changing directions, heading wherever the military needed her. Dean watched the passing coastline and frowned. Her gaze fell on a small boat dock with around 50 sailboats floating in the calm water. At once the tension that she'd felt while sitting in that dockside café almost 10 days ago returned. This time, she recognized it for what it was, a longing! She eyed the sailboats and recognized just how much, she wanted to cast her fate to the winds. The vision she imagined held a sailboat, the wind and her girl in her arms. She sighed happily at the thought.

A slight pressure grounded her inner vision as Chris reached over and placed her smaller hand upon Dean's thigh. Dean turned from the window and followed the hand, up an arm and over to gaze into the worried eyes of her lover.

"Are you alright?" Chris asked softly. Dean smiled warmly and covered the hand with her larger one.

"I was just..." Dean searched for an appropriate word, "...dreaming!"

Chris smiled.

"Was it a good dream, sweetheart?"

Dean nodded, raising the hand she held to kiss the fingers. Chris shivered in reaction.

"You, and I, a boat and the sunset," Dean sighed in pleasure. "I'm not sure it could get much better than that." Dean smiled at Chris. Chris squeezed the hand she held in agreement.

The silver corvette pulled up in front of a fenced in property. The privacy held within was protected and guarded by a six-foot fence disguised by layers of bushes standing eight feet tall.

The entrance was a doublewide, wrought iron security gate that kept out any unwanted visitors. Chris punched in a code at the panel and the electronic movement began to open the gate. Dean raised both eyebrows at the first sight of the inner sanctum.

The beautifully manicured lawn spread over half an acre toward a small lake, which was offset on the opposite side with an eighteen-hole golf course. A sprawling two-story house was overlooking the fields of greenery from its place at the top of the hill. As they drove up the private driveway the addition of a

swimming pool and gazebo on the backside of the house became visible. The Bay Hill residence was obviously well maintained and owned by an affluent family. Dean's curiosity of the Aunt grew by leaps and bounds. The imposing residence and acreage was not at all, what she'd expected. Chris had spoken warmly about her Aunt, but Dean didn't recall her saying anything about her aunt being well off. This grand showcase home was not what Dean had imagined Chris growing up around. It was reassuring though and gave her the comfort of knowing that Chris hadn't been hurting and stuck in a poverty stricken home. What surprised Dean, was the down-to-earth, hard working, mind-set that Chris possessed. This 'Aunt Janice', must have guided the younger Chris to become the striking woman that she was today. Dean could not wait to meet someone so exceptional.

They drove up toward the house seeing the sun falling in the distance. The evening sky showed a darkened front moving in.

Chris began to talk while Dean looked at the ever-impressive grounds. "Aunt Janice lived here with her husband for twenty-three years. I never met Uncle Bryant. He passed on before I arrived here, but she is always talking about his avid golf interests. I think that my Aunt inherited the Pappas Golf Course and she and her husband moved here, when they first got married. She is quite wealthy from my grandmother's side of the family. I believe my mother was well off when she met my father, but they didn't invest well. Unfortunately, my grandmother died before I was born and I never got to meet her either. But, I've been told all my life she was quite a woman. My Aunt was named after her."

Dean listened as she watched the etched glass doors fill with a person's shadow. One side of the double doorway was opened and an elderly woman walked out of the house. She walked out ten feet, limping, with a cane at her side leaning on it as she moved. Standing at the edge of the wide porch, she seemed to be watching as the corvette wound it way closer to the circular drive. Chris grinned as they drove closer and she noticed the older woman shaking her head.

"She's already 'tsking'." Chris chuckled, knowing her Aunt's habits well.

Dean studied the lady as they drove up and saw the remarkable similarities between the Aunt and her niece. They both stood around the same height, their build was similar and the gray streaked hair showed obvious blonde locks throughout the aged mixture. The irrefutable evidence of Chris' family relation to this woman was confirmed as Dean noticed the bright green eyes, that were regarding the silver car intently.

Chris put the car into park and immediately got out. She ran around the car with a huge smile on her face.

“Hi, Aunt Janice! It's great to see you again! I've missed you so much!” Chris was enveloped into a strong hug and the two women held tight for a long moment.

“I've missed you, too.” Aunt Janice said as she pulled back to look at her niece's features. An eyebrow arched up high as Janice detected a change in the younger woman's demeanor. A blush graced Chris' face, as she felt curiously exposed to her Aunt's penetrating gaze.

Dean stood nearby, waiting to be introduced. She smiled at Chris' flush features, the rosy cheeks that bloomed on her face were darling. That adorable reaction was one, that she thought, she would always find attractive. Caught up in watching Chris, she only became aware of Aunt Janice's looking over at her, when she heard a gasp of surprise!

Dean turned to the Aunt with concern and found amazed green eyes gazing at her in fascination. Aunt Janice was standing with a surprised and puzzled expression on her face. She acted as if she had seen Dean before. Her intense examination roamed from Dean's face to her feet and back upward.

Dean quirked an eyebrow as their eyes met once again. *Was she checking me out?* Dean thought.

Before that idea was confirmed, Aunt Janice realized that her eyes had strayed beyond the appropriate and she showed her blood ties with Chris when she flushed with a becoming rosy-cheeked blush of her own.

Dean laughed. Chris grinned and looked at her Aunt curiously. Aunt Janice wrinkled her nose and smiled at the two younger women.

“Sorry, my dear, you remind me of someone I used to know. It's remarkable!” Janice exclaimed, reaching out to shake hands with Dean.

“Aunt Janice, this is Dean. Captain Dean Tanner. She is...” Chris hesitated on how to describe the tall woman. Reaching back into a distant memory she found the word she was looking for. “...she is my companion.” Chris stated, proudly as she held out her hand for Dean to take. Aunt Janice had clasped her two soft hands around Dean's right hand, holding her captive. Dean reached over to her left, taking Chris' outstretched hand in hers. The three women smiled.

“It is so nice to meet you, ma'am. I've heard a lot of good things about you.” Dean said sincerely.

Janice's nose wrinkled up as she gave Dean a sweet smile. “Chris is obviously a little biased, but thank you for your kind words.”

Chris squeezed Dean's hand.

"Let's go inside and have dinner. I'm sure you two are hungry for some of my home cooking." Janice reached down and recovered the cane she had leaned against her pants leg. Chris walked ahead and opened up the door, while Dean followed the limping woman from behind.

"I wish you'd get something less... dangerous to drive, child. That car is trouble in the making." Janice scolded her niece as they moved into the house. The foyer divider wall architecturally supported a twelve-foot high ceiling, just inside the doorway, separating the entrance from the room beyond. The two chatting women chose to head to the right of the dual entry. Walking in behind them, Dean stopped and stood in amazement at the entry decor.

A ten-foot tall gilded frame mirror covered the divider wall and directly reflected Dean standing in front of the doorway. The delicate lace-fine design etched onto the inner edges of the mirror, wove a spidery design around the thick frame. Artistic visions of animals and forest leaves were stenciled on the mirror's surface. Two life-sized statues that were carved in a stone of a natural white color stood on either side of the mirror. Dean was enchanted with their unique carvings.

To the left stood Artemis, the Greek Goddess of the Hunt and the twin sister to Apollo. While he is the sun, she was the moon. Her bow and sandals in silver relief stood out against the pale stone. Her taunt body kneeling beside a tall thin Cyprus tree was arched to fire an arrow. Forest creatures of what looked like a stag and some strange winged creatures, along with the curvature of horses were painstakingly carved into her skirt folds, displayed as she knelt.

To the right of the mirror stood the other cast stone statue of Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, Weaving, and War. Her reproduction was just as impressive as the other. A fantastically hewn two-foot tall owl, with hundreds of intricately carved feathers, sat perched on the strong shoulder of the female figure. A unique helmet was worn on her head; the caricature of a sphinx between two griffons was shown on the banding. A multilayered full-length chiton robe fell downward to tangle with a serpent at her feet. The basic ancient Grecian garment was covered with a small carving of Medusa's head at her breast and Pandora near her womb. Athena held a one-foot tall Nike in her right hand and a spear in her left. An aegis rested against her leg, the unique goatskin shield, which had a fringe of the snakes that Athena was famous for touting.

Dean was amazed at the beautiful work. The figures seemed to be lifelike, regarding her as intently as she regarded them. She heard the voiced warnings of protection; even while the women portrayed their elegance and power.

Chris suddenly appeared from around the divided wall and gave Dean a beautiful flash of her smile. The live version of beauty far outweighed the cold statues and she turned toward the smaller woman.

“Beautiful!” Dean expressed, as she looked at Chris. Chris looked over at the statues and nodded her agreement. Dean stepped forward and shook her head as she grabbed Chris’ hands.

“No, I meant you!”

Chris looked up into those magnetic blue eyes and felt her heart clench, full of love. She lowered her gaze slightly to Dean’s lips and without realizing it she leaned forward, asking for a kiss. Dean captured the soft lips of her lover with her own. A soft clearing of someone’s throat had the two women break apart with a start. Dean winced internally at being caught and hesitated to meet the glare she thought would be waiting for her. Embarrassed at the circumstances she surrendered to the possibility that she might have just ruined the evening. She tensed at the thought of what the Aunt's potential reaction might be.

Dean looked behind Chris to see the twinkling green eyes of Aunt Janice looking back at the two of them. Studying the older woman Dean relaxed slightly and looked down into the flushed features of her girlfriend. Chris looked up, blushing, a wry grin on her face.

“Sorry Aunt Janice. The Goddesses are flouting their skills again.” Chris sighed dramatically, rolling her eyes at the two statues. One, namely Artemis, whom was known to be a virgin, but whose cult followers were sometimes unchaste, the other, Athena, called ‘Mother’ was considered the wedding Goddess at times.

Chris tugged on Dean’s hand and they moved into the spacious living room area. Here Chris stopped and let Dean take in the full flavor of her Aunt's décor.

Dean was in awe at the huge variety of statues, urns, tapestries, candles and plants spread throughout the magnificent house. The myriad of colorful tapestries hanging down from the walls, displayed ancient battles and floral designs; the room was full of history and beauty. Anyone who looked at the fine details and intricate designs should have recognized the staggering amount of time, the immense amount of crafting required to produce such an item. Aunt Janice motioned to Dean, saying that she should continue her exploration of the room while she and Chris set the table.

She moved around the room slowly, taking in the breathtaking sights. Her mind was involved in the art and she marveled at the artifacts and history listed on the plaques near each piece. She barely heard the murmuring of the two women as they spoke together softly.

“She will see the painting, child. I guess I know what I’ll be discussing tonight.”

“I want her to see it, Aunt Janice. She has captured my heart. I would like her to know me.” Chris looked over at the tall, dark haired woman moving from place to place. The excitement in her eyes when she spoke of Dean was evident. Aunt Janice smiled warmly. She had been troubled by her niece’s lack of romantic partners. Although, Dean’s being a woman had been a surprise, she wasn’t adverse to the relationship. By far, she had a lot of experience in understanding that type of partnership. After all, her mom was a ‘companion’ to Melinda Pappas for many years.

Just then, the two women heard a gasp coming from across the room. Dean had made it around the screen dividers and was out of sight. The two pairs of emerald eyes looked at each other and then both women smiled. Aunt Janice tilted her head, nodding in Dean’s general direction and Chris turned to go find her.

Dean was standing under the cathedral ceiling near a giant brick fireplace with a thick mantel, when she found a painting that had her heart pounding. The almost life-sized portrait was stunning. The oil painting showed in vivid color, two women, one fair-haired and the other dark, that were riding double on a white horse. The fair-haired maiden in the portrait held a hint of familial resemblance to Chris. However, out of all the things on display in the room that had amazed Dean, the most shocking was when she looked upon her own blue eyes in the likeness of the dark haired woman.

Chris moved up to stand beside the still figure. Slipping her hand into Deans, she squeezed the tense fingers. Dean looked over at Chris, her confusion evident.

History says a tall, dark haired warrior princess, named Xena, rose from the evil of a battle conqueror to become a fighter for the greater good. During her travels she saw a fair-haired woman named Gabrielle. Gabrielle was village girl and slavers attacked her village. Xena rescued her. The two women began to travel together and eventually fell in love and became intimate ‘companions’.” Dean looked back at the portrait studying the figures.

Chris paused to look up at the painting too. She smiled as she took in the similarities between the portraits Xena and the living Dean. Chris chuckled and pointed to the blonde figure in the portrait. “Gabrielle wrote scroll after scroll of the two of theirs adventures. She was called a bard. I am a descendent of hers.”

“My grandmother Janice was on an excavation over in Greece where she found many artifacts from the dig sites she worked on. She and her partner had most of the treasures replicated and sent the originals to museums around the world. She also found the scrolls that Gabrielle had written. Those became her

obsession. My Aunt inherited the replications and the scrolls, when Grandmother Covington died.”

Dean examined the two figures closely.

The Gabrielle figure wore a forest green sari, which wrapped around and flowed down, draping beautifully to cover a portion of the horse's side. A tall, thin wooden staff with delicate engravings and figures carved into its thickest end was visible on the far side of the horse. Her posture was relaxed as she leaned into the taller form behind her and stared toward the painter, her emerald eyes bright and excited.

The darker figure, named Xena, sat forward, her powerful build surrounding the smaller form in front of her. Strong arms and broad shoulders were taut and flexing, showing their visible strength. One arm was wrapped around Gabrielle's side holding onto the reigns of the horse. The other hand rested possessively over Gabrielle's hip. The raven hair was shoulder length and thick, lifting slightly as if from a breeze. Her angular jaw and high cheekbones showed aristocratic features as she looked at the painter. Deep blue eyes held and captured the viewer, as they seemed to be looking into the soul. She wore strange looking ancient armor made of leather and metal, a belt strapped across one shoulder held some form of a battle sword in a sheath across her back, a circular chakram hung down from a clip at her waist.

“Come on, you two. Dinner will be getting cold if we don't eat right now. I'm sure we have a lot to talk about.” Aunt Janice called from the other side of the screen. Chris squeezed Dean's hand once more and tilted her head, indicating the direction of the dining room around the corner. Dean took one last look at the portrait and followed Chris.

The dinner selection was excellent. A tender beef roast had been prepared with potatoes au gratin and some French greens that were dripping butter. Dean and Chris both mumbled ecstatically over the homemade fare. Chris seemed to be starving and ate an extra helping of all three items, plus her milk and bread roll. Dean and Aunt Janice sat sipping fresh coffee as they waited for Chris to finish.

“I'm stuffed!” The blonde finally exclaimed. “Aunt Janice, you've out done yourself once again.”

“Oh hush. You're just happy to have real food. I thought those cruises were all about the food?” Dean and Chris both nodded agreement. “I understand what Chris is talking about. A home cooked meal beats the processed en masse food selection that we have anytime. We cook for hundreds. You cooked for three. The food is just better, no matter how you slice it.” Dean grinned at her obviously poorly stated pun. Chris moaned and Janice rolled her eyes.

“So are you going to tell me about them?” Dean pointed toward the screened off room.

“Ahh yes. Them. The infamous duo.” Aunt Janice smiled. She tilted her head to the side; the action looking so much like that of her niece, Dean had to smile. Aunt Janice sat thinking.

“I believe the majority of the story behind those two women was discovered by my mother. Janice Covington was an archeologist. While she was quite young, she traveled with her father from site to site. A year after she finally received her Doctorate in Archeology her father died. He left her part of a scroll as her inheritance. She, of course, went on a hunt.”

Aunt Janice grinned at the thought of her mother as the young, impetuous, treasure-hunting archeologist. She leaned back from the table and shook her head. Dean heard a tsking sound and glanced over at Chris. Chris was holding a napkin in front of her mouth to hide the grin.

“My mother was a diminutive blonde, with a gigantic personality full of grit, determination and charisma. She had way too much of a gung ho attitude, rough and ready brashness, along with a definite skill for finding trouble. Thank God for Mel.” Aunt Janice explained quickly, seeing Dean’s frown.

“Melinda Pappas, was just a student. However, her father was the Dean at the University of South Carolina and winner of a Nobel Prize in Anthropology. Highly respected and a friend of Janice’s father, she decided to write him and ask about translating the scroll. Possibly he could have translated it, but he passed on not long after Mr. Covington. His daughter Melinda intercepted the mail from Janice and the rest is history. They met, gazed at each other and discovered their soul mate.”

Dean frowned again and Aunt Janice shook her head at the impatient look she was being given. “Hold on, I’m getting to that.” Aunt Janice sighed.

“Mother just happened to be working at a dig site when Mel tracked her down. The dig site was supposed to give further illumination directly related to the scroll left to her by her father. However, she was in a bind. Some very eager grave robbers were there to take her treasures and her scroll. Melinda arrived and with one glance at the small spitfire trying to defend herself she stepped up to the plate and intimidated the leader of the bandits with her tall, dark, anger filled southern charm. Nothing is as intimidating as an angry southern woman. Oh, my mother fell hard. She denied Melinda’s graceful save and intimated that she had it all under control. Holding her hat in her hand she fingered the brand new gun shot hole as she lied to the stunning raven-haired beauty.

Well Melinda, wasn't about to let the experience with the gun slinging marauders firing at her, deter her from the reason she had arrived in the first place. She agreed to disagree on the 'who saved whom' story if Janice, would give her a chance to study the scroll. Janice practically swallowed her tongue when Melinda decided to add a little charm to the request. My mother was out of her league at times. She would have agreed to give the parchment up to Melinda if the woman had just asked, but thankfully, Melinda had principles. She wanted to further her knowledge and she respected my mother for standing up to the goons that had attacked her."

"Melinda once told me if she had to describe my mother at that moment she would have said she was "standing on the edge of a cliff bending her knees to jump. Melinda tossed a rope at the exact moment that mother needed it. And I'm certainly glad that she did."

Chris refilled the coffee cups silently listening to the same story that she'd heard many times when she was growing up. Each time she heard another little tidbit that allowed the pieces of the puzzle to align together perfectly.

"My mother hired Melinda and discovered that she was brilliant within minutes, as she fluently began to translate the scroll she was studying. Melinda discovered Dr. Covington showing her prowess a week later, when she began listening to Mel and stopped asking questions. The two women made progress on the hunt and eventually discovered another scroll. The pieces began to be discovered; one by one and they uncovered a hidden world filled with a bard's tales, adventure, historical facts and proof beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Gods did interfere in the mortal's realms. The scrolls had the power to turn myth into history and history into myth. And mom was right, the scrolls did just that."

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#### **Disclaimer:**

1. **Copyright:** These are NOT all my characters. Some of them are owned by someone else...who blah blah ...you know. I don't claim them, but I like to play with them. OH boy! Play...mmmm mmmm. The rest is my Copyright © 2005 All Rights Reserved. Send comments to [JLNickymaster@aol.com](mailto:JLNickymaster@aol.com)
2. **Violence:** Nope
3. **Sexual content:** Umm smooching of course...and lesbian lip locks and lesbian dancing and lesbian food...oh wait...hmmm...ok, I'm just nuts.
4. **Special thanks:** to my computer who only hung up 12 times. Piece of sh...! And to my beta that actually saved our IM conversation for posterity, or something and helped me recover a couple of lost pages from the previously mentioned piece of shi..! Thanks super beta woman (strange habit but...I guess it's handy.)
5. **Language:** No dammit!

6. **Note from the beta:** She borrowed a Roberta Flack, love song for this one... blah blah. No personal gain. etc.etc. Is anyone besides me, interested in a sequel? Heh. Gottcha! Oh and ~ *Yòù're Wêlçômë Nîç!! Łóvê ñ kîššěš, M* 😊

This is **PART 9**. This is the **CONCLUSION** to Deepest Ocean Green.

## **Deepest Ocean Green Part 9... Conclusion**

Maiden Voyage Itinerary for Queen Victoria Cruise Ship - From Orlando's nearby port of entry Cape Canaveral, we will sail to Miami, Key West Island and across the Atlantic to Cozumel. After a quick visit to the Bahamas, we will circle back to Fort Lauderdale and then make our way to return home to Cape Canaveral.

Aunt Janice paused to ask if the three of them could retire to the sitting area. Dean followed the two women back into the room, which was dominated by the stunning portrait above the mantel. Aunt Janice continued on with her story after the three of them were seated and comfortable.

Dean listened with fascination as they leapt back into the history of the owner's of the portrait.

"Let's see here. Where was I? Oh yes, the treasure hunt. They found scroll after scroll written by a bard named Gabrielle. She told dramatic and amazing stories of her travels with a woman named Xena. Xena was, according to the tales of Gabrielle, a warrior princess and friend of Hercules, the son of the Greek God, Zeus. She was the 'chosen' by Ares, the God of War and a sworn enemy to many others that had survived, throughout her warlord days and yet still held a grudge. Some lesser Gods, Callisto and Velasca, were born merely to seek out and destroy Xena. Gabrielle spoke of Tartarus and the River of Styx along with Hades, God of the underworld and ruler of the dead."

"Gabrielle, also spent time among the Gods, where she met and befriended Aphrodite, Goddess of Love. She recounted many trials and tribulations of their lives together that were so full of historical facts, that the writings were proved to be true. Janice and Melinda spent many long nights unraveling the mystery of these two women."

"Well, needless to say, the scroll hunting had to end one day. Janice and Mel found a final message that spoke of Xena's death. Gabrielle had poured out her undying love for the warrior while holding her in her arms. During her last moments of life, Xena promised they would meet again soon, if not in this life, then the next. Gabrielle wrote of a dying request that Xena had made to the

Gods, that their love would never die. Xena pledged her love to endure throughout eternity. Gabrielle promised to find her wherever they may be, this life or the next.”

“The Gods complied. To this day the Gabrielle family line has been fated to meet their Xena counterpart, or as we call it their soul mate. The fated soul must join with its other half, one person who in this life is destined to fill the void of a heart untouched by true love. The only person capable of completing and fulfilling the promise that Xena made to Gabrielle; is Xena’s soul, reborn.

Dean frowned in confusion. Fated? Destined? A trusting hand claimed hers underneath the table, squeezing it reassuringly. She looked over at Chris and read her features. Chris was asking for a chance to show Dean more. Dean could not refuse.

“Why don't you let me show you something, sweetheart?” Chris asked, even as she blushed at the warm feeling that came from using the endearment. She glanced at her Aunt and the elderly woman gave a nod of encouragement and made shooing motions with her hands.

Dean and Chris stood up, Chris led them further into the house. They entered a large room off the hallway and Dean was struck silent at the contents. An enormous area with all four walls covered in portrait after portrait of people from the past.

“This is a historical collection of our familial line, painted back through the centuries. Each generation continues the pictorial if they are able.”

“These are all your relatives?” Dean asked as she looked around the room at the hundreds of portraits.

“Chris pulled her into the room then turned her to the painting closest to the door.

“Every one of them is related to me.”

“That’s just amazi...” Dean’s voice dropped off to a whisper as she gazed at the giant painting hanging on the wall. The eyes of the painted figures looked down at her, seemingly alive and amused. Uncle Bryant with Aunt Janice. She felt a chill of an eerie déjà vu rolling down her spine as she recognized both of the people from Chris’ lineage. A shiver touched her when she realized she had never met one of the people from that painting in her life. But she recognized him from somewhere. Although she had never met him, she tried to think of a picture or news article she might have seen him in. Deep down, it was just something unexplainable. She knew him. Dean looked at the strikingly handsome features of a tall man, with dark black hair and beautiful blue eyes that twinkled even in the frozen state of the oiled masterpiece. His laugh lines and

endearing lopsided grin were strikingly familiar. She recognized him and knew; she would have known him anywhere. It was almost frightening.

Dean moved to the next painting of a tall raven haired woman dressed in a flowing white blouse, her tan skin standing out in the portrait as she stared down, crystal blue eyes filled with love for the smaller figure beside her. A stocky woman, wearing a fedora hat with a wide brim and a saucy tilt to the front edge was grinning up at the taller woman. Her blonde hair was sticking outward from the edges of the fedora and her green eyes danced with happiness. She wore a men's style button down and a leather jacket over her blouse. The dynamics between the women was obvious, even without looking at the two hands that were clasped with matching rings affixed on their fingers.

"That is Janice Covington and Melinda Pappas." Chris said in a hushed, yet awestruck voice. Dean wrapped her arm around Chris' shoulders as she felt the strength and love pour out of that painting toward them. She could almost imagine Janice Covington, wishing them good travels and a glorious adventure. Melinda had eyes only for her partner.

Dean's eyes moved on; from painting to painting as she began to listen to Chris describe the people. Every picture held at least one familiar form. The shape of their faces, their eye color and the fairest hair of blonde characterized the similarities displayed between them and Chris.

Dean was amazed as Chris rambled off the names and facts on each of the pairs of people in each painting. A few paintings down, the people did not look as happy. The portrait held four figures standing in two pairs. A blonde man with green eyes stood on the right and his wife, a brown haired slightly larger woman was at his side. They were both frowning. To the left of the portrait stood a beautiful dark haired woman with a striking dark haired man and both of these figures were smiling. However, Dean noted what looked like strain, or fatigue in the eyes of the woman.

"That is Rachael Wallace and her husband Sir Michael. They broke the fate cycle by marrying outsiders. She died of old age and alone, her husband placed in jail for crimes that he had committed during a four-year stint as the Captain of a Galleon. He was reported to have killed and maimed many with a vicious streak that would rival Borias the warlord, Xena's husband and the father of Solan. Rachael's best friend and confidant through out her life was my cousin Shawn that green eyed fellow there." She pointed to the other couple included in the portrait. "We always supposed that her soul mate should have been cousin Shawn. Both families ended in tragedy. Shawn's wife ended up dying in childbirth two years after this painting. The child, my great cousin Gwen, is over there. Dean's eyes moved over a painting to take in a beautiful buxom young blonde that was grasping the arm of a devilishly handsome young man who once again had the bluest eyes glowing out of the portrait.

Chris continued to explain many of the other portraits, their love affairs, their happiness, their tragedies, and left Dean stunned with the overflow of fact filled proof that backed up the soul mate theory. Dean realized she either had to believe in the fate of this theory, or negate it. If she decided she couldn't honestly believe her future was fated to be this way, then she realized she was not accepting something that Chris truly believed in. A fate for the two of them, that would effect how they would live, love and exist, forever. Eventually, she was standing in the middle of the room and began shaking her head. It was an impossible belief to understand. The thought of an everlasting soul mate fated by destiny to be reborn and find their mate holding the other half of their soul. But, she paused, deep in thought. She remembered that one moment in time when she had first looked into her lover's emerald eyes.

*The wind was knocked out of her as a short blonde dynamo collided into her on the deck. "Oomph" was all she could manage to say as she dropped her duffle and stepped back into a more balanced stance. Her hands had come up to hold onto the moving figure before any more damage had been done.*

*"Excuse me!" Chris had apologized, as her eyes looked Dean up and down, taking in the tall body standing before her. Dean watched the blonde's eyes climb upward to her face as they took stock of each other. The blonde swallowed, her eyes overly bright. She was blinking as she looked upward. Dean noted the slight sway of the smaller woman and hesitated before reaching out.*

*"Did I hurt you?" She asked, her voice husky from singing with the radio enroute. The blonde woman shook her head side to side and looked away for a moment. Settling back down, she took a deep breath and spoke for the first time since running directly into the woman.*

*"The sunlight hurt my eyes," Dean's gut instinct knew that the woman had just lied. She didn't have time to analyze anything since she was already being told to leave.*

*"We were not expecting guests until tomorrow. I can escort you back to the gangway if you would like."*

*Dean didn't mean to sound sarcastic, but she just couldn't help teasing a bit. "Then who would captain the ship if I were to leave?" she asked, politely, smiling. A beautiful rosy blush filled the pale cheeks of the blonde. It was arresting to see the rose color turn crimson when she suddenly opened her mouth and let out what Dean was sure she really wasn't meant to hear.*

*"You're the captain?"*

*Dean frowned.*

*"I'm s...sorry. That was...rude of me. The telegram didn't mention...a woman." The blonde tried to jump out of the hole she was digging. "In fact the telegram didn't mention either sex at all. Just... ummm." She paused. Dean hoped she would finish her thoughts. She looked too cute; Dean was charmed by the woman and couldn't find a good reason to hold this against her.*

*Dean tilted her dark head to one side and arched an eyebrow. The flush only deepened on the blonde's cheeks.*

*"Sorry! I didn't mean to make that sound so...ummm...weird...sorry." Suddenly standing at full attention, she thrust out her hand. "Welcome aboard."*

*Dean looked down at the small hand and back at the younger face of the woman who was trying hard to remain calm. The turbulent, green eyes were shining brightly with unshed tears. An obvious fatigue stood visible in those eyes, the blonde's hand began to shake slightly.*

*Dean reached up and removed her sunglasses. Her electric blue eyes met verdant green eyes blinking at the collision. A sense of déjà vu struck them both. Dean felt her breath hitch and thought 'did the ship just move?'*

Dean realized as she reminisced that her world had come together and become whole at that meeting. Regardless of the romantic nature of their future relationship, Dean had known the small figure she had met that day was going to be in her life. She smiled at the continued recollection.

*She made a slow perusal of the petite woman before her. Her roaming eyes caressed the tension filled body taking in every nuance of rounded form and clinging uniform. Dean used her sapphire eyes to read the true nature of the other woman's soul. She measured the petite figure from head to foot and back up again.*

*Taking the smaller hand still resting between Dean held it close and clasped it into the warmth between her own. Dean recalled a faint memory roaming around in her head. The emerald eyes Chris had looked at her with. She had recognized them.*

*"Glad to run into you, Officer...?"*

*"Parker. Chris Parker!" Chris managed to say, albeit with a slight waver in her voice.*

Once again Dean blinked to focus on the here and now. This was the second time she had run across that déjà vu with Chris. Being the sensible person that she was, Dean realized coincidence only went so far. There was definitely

something involved in the two of them meeting that short time ago. Fate or destiny, call it what ever you want, Dean realized the memory was filled with a beautiful woman who she had come to love very deeply.

Dean stopped shaking her head in confusion and realized the memory had stood out because Chris had made such an impact on her. The petite officer had filled her with thoughts and feelings and that's something no other person had ever been able to do. With a simple glance of her eyes Dean had known her heart was in trouble.

She glanced over at her lover who was standing near the piano looking up at Janice Covington and Melinda Pappas.

"It's true you know." Dean's husky voice spoke loudly in the quiet of the room. All the eyes of each figure in every portrait stared down at her for the remark. She ignored them all as she only sought out one person's attention. Those green eyes turned to look at her and once again she felt her world tilt. It was a precious gift Chris was giving and Dean wanted to make sure Chris knew it was just as important to her.

"It's true." Dean said softer. Chris looked at her quizzically. Dean held out her hand for the woman to come take. Chris began moving without being asked.

As their hands met and their eyes filled up with each other's gaze. Dean smiled.

"You are my soul mate. I wouldn't want to give my soul to anyone but you. I'm yours forever!"

Chris drew in a sharp breath and her eyes filled with tears as Dean pulled her forward and wrapped her in her strong arms. Chris trembled at the feeling of having someone enter into her heart so deeply.

She hoped the following years of their lives would be as wonderful as she had always imagined her Grandmother's life had been. Dean murmured a heartfelt 'I love you' as Chris closed her eyes and let the tears fall. She cried softly and held tight. Dean felt her own eyes water with happiness. The future was waiting and they both knew that they were going to be together.

A while later the two women returned to find their elderly host asleep in her chair, a silver edged picture frame of an 8x10 sat on the end table next to her elbow. Her husband's smiling countenance looked outward. It seemed as if she might have been looking at it before drifting into sleeping.

Chris touched the elderly woman's shoulder and Aunt Janice woke instantly. She blinked a few times then grinned sheepishly.

"I'm afraid I'm a tad tired. Must have been the large dinner we ate." Chris leaned down and kissed Aunt Janice's cheek and then lowered herself into the nearby couch. Dean sat down next to Chris her expression still dazed by the wellspring of information she had taken in.

"What is the verdict, young one. Have you experienced the fascinating history of our clan and become caught in it's irresistible trap?" Aunt Janice chuckled as she shared the often thought of conspiracy theory of the Gabrielle familial lineage.

Dean slowly nodded her head. She began to explained that first moment when she'd met Chris. She also talked to Aunt Janice about other strange things that had just fallen into place. Aunt Janice smiled and blinked back shining tears from her lively green eyes. She welcomed Dean in to the family.

Chris had once again started a lively recount of various obscure relatives when the grandfather clock began to chime. Out of instinct, both Dean and Chris glanced at their watches. Double frowns looked over at Aunt Janice. She sat looking at them grinning.

"It's like a curfew. I expect you two are going to make your way back down here soon. I'll cook you more food and expect great and exciting stories about your travels. I have to start another painting. Dean's eyes widened, in surprise.

"You painted those portraits?"

"Aunt Janice, smiled and shook her head in denial. I only painted my mother and her partner along with a smaller portrait of Chris, but It's in another room."

Dean nodded impressed. The painting had been very lively.

"We need to go Dean. I will have preparations to make for the New Years Party tomorrow and then we will be having the guests exit the ship during checkout. It's going to be a long day.

"Midnight dance is saved for me!" Dean stated, as she stood up and held out her hand to Chris. Chris smiled and gave Dean a lovely quirked eyebrow.

"Of course, mon Capitan!"

Dean chuckled.

After saying goodnight they drove the short trip back to the parking garage and covered the car. Walking toward the docks that were a block away, they marveled at all the street life. Pedestrians and moving vehicles, along with roller

skaters, bikers and people walking their pets, were still gracing the streets. They barely noticed the sky full of stars due to the streetlamps lighting the way.

Boarding the ship they were singled out by staff and informed of various tasks and events that were taking place. Dean was going onto shift in less than five hours, while Chris would be on duty at seven am.

They finished with their updates and assigned various follow up with the staff and managed to meet up again on the way to their cabins.

“Come stay with me, Chris. I want to hold you while I sleep. I’ll be gone in a few hours and I need you close.” Dean asked softly as they moved down the hall. Chris nodded as they passed her cabin and casually entered Dean's.

Once inside Dean took her hand and led her to the bedroom, where she untucked Chris blouse and gently removed it from her shoulders. The pants were removed and Dean found one of her own T-shirts to slide over the small woman. She wore the shirt like a dress, covering her thighs completely.

Dean shrugged off her clothes and quickly donned a tank top and boxer shorts.

The two women slid into the bed and gravitated to each other like magnets. Their naked skin slid together and their clothed body parts pressed into each other's hills and valleys. They both sighed in relief.

Within minutes the sounds of their deeper breathing was the only noise in the cabin.

Less than seven hours later, Dean was coordinating with the port authorities on the arrival of the cruise ship into the docking port of Cape Canaveral. The cruise was about to come to an end. But, not before Tanner Industries provided a huge New Year's celebration portside party to bring in the New Year properly. Dean had listened to the one-sided conversations of her 1st officer on the boat-to-shore phone system for over two hours. Chris had contacted the support team sent from Tanner's corporate office and began verifying the decoration details while the ship was still at sea. The preparations were well under way for the shore-side party at the dock long before the ship trolled into the slip and cut the engines.

The passengers were being urged to attend the gala and enjoy the last night of Tanner provided festivities. One of the highlighted selling points of booking a cruise through Tanner Industries was the additional benefit of the closing party at the dock. For every cruise the staff threw an arrival party at the dock that usually lasted a few hours. For the New Year's gala, the party would last until 1am. Prior to the cruise leaving port on day one, Chris had already arranged the catering and decorations with Tanner headquarters. She also arranged for the

Spanish style decorations of paper lanterns to be strung around the area to signify the boundaries of the event. Armbands were being given to the passengers from the exiting walkway, along with additional brochures for future cruises. A small bag of party favors were available as well.

With the ship at the docking slip and staff completely busy with the exiting procedures they had to follow, Dean began her own checklist of ship duties. The primary inspection of the engine room was first. Over the next three days the ship would be inspected from top to bottom in preparation for the next cruise. Dean's task was to make sure the ship was secured and available for the next trip.

The first officer of the cruise ship Queen Victoria, stood with her clipboard full of forms with checkmarks and notes at the disembarkment walkway. The families not staying for the New Year's Party were already checking out. A subordinate came over and tapped the woman on her shoulder, as she appeared to be deeply concentrating on something. Chris looked up and smiled, slightly distracted.

"Ma'am, the captain requests you retire to get ready for the party." Chris blinked to clear her thoughts and then looked down at her watch.

"Oh my God." She barely registered the young woman who removed the clipboard from her hand, as she turned to head back to her cabin. She was going to have to hurry to be ready for the beginning party ceremonies.

Chris quickly showered. Donning another fresh uniform she made sure that she looked appropriate for standing in front of a crowd before turning to head out of her cabin.

Stepping out of the door, she was immediately aware of Dean, who was standing down the hall. They met each other half way and smiled. Dean could not keep the goofy expression off of her face as she looked down at her lover. Chris wore a beautiful smile that was full of love and promises. Dean offered her arm to the smaller woman and Chris took it. They began to walk toward the elevators to find their way to the party.

Arriving at the exit walkway ten minutes later, they followed some of the passengers down the ramp. Halfway down, the party's dockside location came into sight. Hundreds of paper lantern lights lit up the scene as a surrounding border to a well-marked area. Additional table candles and soft florescent lights brightened up a designated sitting area and the bar. A dancing area at the other end was glittering with white floating light spots from an electronic device made to resemble the older disco balls. The disco effect was magical. The passengers ahead of Dean and Chris ooh'd and ahhh'd at the pretty setting held under the darkened sky that was full of stars. The couple eventually made

their way over to a stage set up with microphones and a small podium. The crowd was already over four hundred people and the music had begun an hour ago. The once empty dance floor was beginning to fill with sharply dressed couples that were dancing and laughing. Children were invited to eat and enjoy the festivities too. Many families were present, their children dressed beautifully and behaving well.

At the ending of a song Dean stepped up to the microphone and flipped the switch. Chris cut the music off with a quick wave to the DJ. The assembled crowd noticed the officers near the raised dais and settled down.

“Good evening. I just wanted to wish everyone a great New Year's Eve and hope the New Year brings you everything you wish for.”

Dean turned slightly to her side and caught Chris' eyes.

“I know mine will be the best New Year, I've ever had.” Dean cleared her throat, as it grew slightly hoarse and full of emotions that she had not intended on displaying. My staff and I would like to ensure that you've had the best of our Tanner Cruise line experience and this closing shindig is just one way of expressing our appreciation for your patronage. I'm Captain Dean Tanner, Happy New Year!” The crowd whistled and clapped their happiness at the remarks.

Dean cleared her throat one more time to gain the audiences attention.

“My First Officer Chris Parker, would like to regale you with some official final cruise information that will allow you to check out of the ship without any problems arising. Here she is.”

Dean stepped away from the microphone podium and watched Chris move forward.

Chris welcomed everyone to the party and insisted they make full use of the catered food and drinks. The bar was running special pricing for the celebration and all tables would be provided with a complimentary bottle of champagne for every two adults. The waiters and waitresses would hand out the champagne around 11:30 -11:45pm. Chris suggested the use of the ship's babysitting facilities for the younger ones. The party would be 'adults only' after 11:00pm. The service was being offered for free for passengers of the cruise ship up until 1am.

Chris went over some of the highlights from a few of the stops during the cruise. A professional photographer has captured many of the ship's passengers performing various activities. A slide projector began to cycle through showing spontaneous shots caught during the trip. She announced that the show would

continue throughout the evening over at the southern end of the dining area. Wishing good luck to everyone Chris told the audience that she hoped to welcome them back again in the future.

“Enjoy the evening, brought to you by Tanner Industries. Thank you.” Chris concluded.

The two officers moved away from the dais and began to circulate throughout the party. Almost without thought the tall, dark-haired captain knelt down and scooped up the small girl in the pink who'd taken off like a bullet, tearing away from her family and running in Dean's direction at a breakneck speed.

“Captain! Where have you been? I missed you!” Brandy exclaimed as Dean returned to her full height with the additional load of having a cute little pixie in her arms. The two of them looked like mirror images in resemblance. Brandy had the same dark hair and blue eyes. Dean grinned into the sweet face and winked. Brandy grinned and reached up to pull down one of her own eyelids when it wouldn't wink back. Dean chuckled.

“Who do you think is driving the boat honey?” Brooke asked, her voice full of amusement. She walked up to the Captain and shook her head amazed at the instant camaraderie that her daughter showed toward the imposing officer. It was amazing to see, since the young girl had always had the shyest personality.

“Steering the boat, mommy. Steering. Right Ca...ca...Captain?” Brandy asked looking back slightly worried at making a mistake. Dean was just glad that the little shyness, Brandy had showed upon their first meeting each other, was not being displayed after each word she stumbled on. Dean hugged the little heartbreaker tight and with a slightly hoarse voice from some unpredictable emotions, she expressed how proud she was of Brandy and that the correct word was ‘steering’.

The two women and the girl made their way back over to the two blonde women who had gotten together on sight and were deep into a conversation. Chris was highly flushed at whatever they were talking about and Georgia was wide-eyed and grinning.

“Well don't you feel a little unease at this situation, Captain?” Brooke said in an exaggeratingly fake southern drawl. Dean looked over at the two women who had stopped talking and noticed that they were both now slightly flushed. She gave Chris a curious look and then relaxed when Chris looked back shyly, but without any alarm being displayed.

Setting the youngster down, Brandy crawled into Georgia's lap and rested against her while the grownups sat and chatted.

“We wanted to know if you guys wouldn’t mind us leaving a contact number? Letting us know what’s happening in your lives.” Brooke asked, laying a hand over her wife’s that was on the table and giving it a brief squeeze. Dean nodded her head in agreement.

“We would love to keep in touch. Right Chris?” Dean deferred, looking over to her own partner. Chris nodded and smiled that beautiful smile, she showed only rarely to others. Brooke and Georgia both blinked at the sudden transformation in the First Officer.

Dean smiled and resisted the urge to lean over and kiss the small blonde.

The four adults spoke of the cruise they had just been on from their four different perspectives. The four women laughed at each other’s stories and found the warmth of their friendships had grown during the cruise. They parted company around 10:30, when Brandy was taken up toward the babysitter. Brandy had already drifted off to sleep and only mumbled ‘luv you’ to Dean before she left. Dean was grinning from ear to ear at the young girls words.

The two officers headed over for a drink and some food. They moved off into different groups to speak to the various passengers and generally enjoyed the evening. As the clock moved closer and closer to the midnight hour, the last year moved into history and time moved onward, readying for the countdown into a brand New Year. Dean and Chris automatically gravitated toward each other. They broke away from the groups they had been speaking with and moved next to each other. Dean looked at her watch and noted that there were only minutes left until the New Year would begin.

She held out her hand to her partner and Chris took it willingly. They both moved toward the dance floor oblivious to any stray looks, or remarks as Dean took Chris into her arms and began to dance the last song of the old year.

The DJ has chosen a slow melody that had Dean and Chris blinking rapidly to restrain their tears of happiness.

The first time, ever I saw your face  
I thought the sun rose in your eyes  
And the moon and the stars  
Were the gifts you gave  
To the dark, and the endless skies  
My Love.

Dean looked down at the smaller woman and smiled at her head resting on Dean’s chest. The song continued.

And the first time, ever I kissed your mouth

I felt the earth move in my hands  
Like the trembling heart  
Of a captive bird  
That was there, at my command  
My Love.

And the first time, ever I lay with you  
I felt your heart so close to mine  
And I knew our joy  
Would fill the earth  
And last, til the end of time  
My Love.  
And last, 'til the end of time.  
My love.

Dean and Chris looked at each other and fell into their love drowning in each other's oceans.

"Happy New Year! I love you Chris Parker." Dean whispered into Chris' ear as the crowd around them counted down the last 10 seconds of the old year and burst into wild noise as the time began moving forward into the new. Dean held Chris to her tightly and thanked the Gods listening for giving her the one she wanted to be with forever.

"I love you too, Dean Tanner. I'll never let you go." Chris held tight and promised internally to any God listening that she would do everything possible to make Dean happy for the rest of their lives.

Epilogue - eleven months later.

The hissing sound of the wooden 41-foot hull slicing through the high ocean waves was heard above the pounding sound of wind, caught and battering around inside the unfurled mainsail and a smaller headsail above it. The 60 foot mast dipped and rocked with the water's rhythm as the boat moved forward. The lone figure guiding the boat, stood before a massive brass ship's wheel holding it with the tips of her long fingers. A few gentle moves of the wheel had the B & R rigging embedded through the deck responding with ease to the guidance being given at the helm.

Dark raven hair whipped in the currents of air flowing over the pointed stern of the vessel. The vibrating power of each air current failed to intimidate the controller of the boat as she ignored the whistling strength of the wind running along the deck and moving above the bulking shrouds of lateral mast supports. The boat was an extension of her power and she drove forward, living in the vital pleasure at the ability to control something riding on the uncontrollable waters.

Her eyes, hidden by the reflective lenses of the sunglasses watched the open waters before her, seeking the ever present tossing of waves from Poseidon's dominion. Her lips where parted and dry as she fought against the vicious temper of the sea God.

As if on cue, a figure emerged from beneath the hold and started making her way toward the helm. The balancing act began as a bottle and two glasses were held on to tightly and the blonde's curled hair was whipped in all directions. The bikini top showed the instant hardening of her nipples as the fresh air pressed the cloth flat. The short wrap around skirt was double tied, the cloth wrapped like a second skin against the tanned legs beneath. Sunglass covered eyes held their fascination for the Captain of the boat as the small figure walked a short length of the deck from the hatch below toward the raven-haired figure nearby.

"Thirsty?" Chris asked with a throaty whisper as she came up behind the tall figure and ran her hand down the broad shoulders to clasp the firm butt cheek. The t-shirt that covered the skin showed the bunching of the muscles above as did the tight swimmers shorts Dean wore. The flash of a brilliant white grin was the only reply as Dean quickly ensconced Chris under one of her arms and pulled her closer.

"Your voice is very raw, my love. Maybe you should try drinking some hot tea to sooth it." Dean suggested, her own voice coming out just as raspy and sensual. Chris grinned up at her lover and winked.

"I'll try not to yell when we make love, dearest. I do believe that is the source of the problem." Chris flirted, running her fingers over the strong arm holding her within.

Dean laughed and squeezed her partner tightly.

"So how does the newest Captain of Tanner Industries feel about a Spanish tour down to the Falkland Islands of South America? The new owner of the Cruise line has decided to include a tour for those parts. Since my Uncle David has decided to retire, I have decided to expand a bit and add some additional cruise tours. I would just love to have you accompanying me on the guided tour that some potential partners will be taking us on. I've heard the islands are a sight to see with the Gentoo penguins being ashore all year-round and December is one of the breeding months.

Chris looked up, her green eyes dancing with pleasure and excitement.

"I'd love to Captain!" Chris reciprocated.

Dean leaned down and kissed the tip of Chris' nose. Chris leaned back up and kissed the strong chin above. Somewhere in the middle, their lips sought each

other out and they fell into a deep kiss. The dual moans that were heard were quickly swept up into the air to float behind the boat and sink into the sea. As the kiss broke a wicked grin stole over the smaller blonde's features.

"Speaking of breeding?" Chris seemed to wait to continue until their eyes locked together.

The taller woman looked down at those beautiful dream-filled deep ocean green eyes and saw a flicker of a flame ignite inside the beauty of her gaze. An entire conversation seemed to jump into Dean's head as she began to imagine small blonde children running and scrambling over the deck of their new 41' ocean fairing home away from the cruise line. One particular child was raven-haired like herself. Dean drew in a sharp breath as she imagined the possibilities. Both women tightened their hold on the other as they stood staring at each other. The future seemed boundless as they explored each other's love. The excitement and adventure were sure to follow as long as they were together, their souls complete.

THE END.