



Honesty and Artifice

S.H. Allan

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He'd trained for every eventuality—
except losing his heart...

Boaz Egan never expected to find another human being on his empty beach, especially one nearly dead. After years of isolation and secrets, he's unprepared for the feelings that Eric Atherton awakens in him. While Eric recuperates, the two men grow closer, and it doesn't take long for Boaz to begin to question whether his reasons for remaining alone are good enough.

But Eric has secrets of his own, ones that bring grave danger, and could end what has been building between them, maybe their very lives. For the men to know if they have a chance together, they'll have to brave their fears and face demons from the past.

In the lonely and vast ocean waters of Alaska, the two men only have themselves to rely on. Can either man trust the other enough to survive the coming storm? Or will Boaz's one chance for love be over before it even began?

Genre: action/suspense/adventure

Tags: first time, masturbation, past abuse, strong HFN, Alaska, series, isolation, boats

Content Warnings: allusions to childhood abuse

This story was written as a part of the M/M Romance Group's "**Love's Landscapes**" event. Group members were asked to write a story prompt inspired by a photo of their choice. Authors of the group selected a photo and prompt that spoke to them and wrote a short story.

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The M/M Romance Group strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

The original prompt:

Dear Author,

I found him in the edge of the surf one morning, on one of my many solitary treks down the beach. Naked, battered, unconscious—just another bit of discarded flotsam on the sand.

Who is he? How did he get here? Is he telling me the truth? Can I trust him at all? Can I help him—or can he help me? Or maybe we can even save each other...

Photo Description:

A muscular, dark-haired man lies prone on a sandy beach, waves frothing and swirling around him. He is naked save for a tiny bikini or underwear that is barely clinging to the round globes of his backside. He also has on a small, dark, braided bracelet. If not for a mound of sand beneath his head, his face would be immersed in the water. He appears to be unconscious.

Honesty and Artifice Details

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From Reader Review Honesty and Artifice for online ebook

Kristan says

3.5 stars

This story is more of a journey than a romance, because these two men (Eric and Boaz) are so mysterious. Their feelings grow quickly for each other but it feels like a slow bloom as they both slowly peel back their layers when revealing information about themselves.

I don't want to go into plot because I feel like the mystery and suspense is better experienced while reading than expressed here. I will say that the writing was well done. The author writes with (brackets) and - hyphens- but so do I, so it didn't really bother me, but may bother some. The descriptions and setting were excellent. It's written in Boaz's POV and it's interesting to be inside his head. He's so stoic on the outside but inside a little insecure and the genuine joy he expresses while describing something made me smile.

I liked that this story wasn't so predictable, and I loved how the MCs were with each other. (Their boat scene was HOT)

I do have one unanswered question that bugged me throughout the story (view spoiler)

I'm hoping that the author continues to expand this into a series. I think it would be successful and I know I would be interested in reading it.

Great addition to the Loves Landscapes event.

Sandra says

Offered for FREE from the M/M Romance Group's Love's Landscapes event. Thank you too all the amazing authors who participated!

4.5 stars Oh my. I'm a little at a loss for words to be honest. I thought this was just about perfect. Yes, I'd love more details about Boaz's past. Yes, I'd love to stay and see more from these guys. But it wouldn't have been realistic for Boaz to reveal too much, and too many details could have felt like they were trying to shock us when the mystery of it still had the same emotional effect. Do not be fooled, this is a full length novel that packs an equal punch. There is some sex but it's minor and later on in the book. This is about a troubled soul and his rescuer, who needed rescuing. Just wonderful.

I would *love* to get a follow up of their journey (view spoiler), although if not the ending is still perfect. *Love* the last line, so Boaz. (view spoiler)

Annika says

I really liked this story up until the climax with the bad guys. I can't really put a finger on it but it kind of really bothered me. I would have preferred to see these two work out their issues without the drama. In this regard I also felt Boaz "caving in" to moving into the city came far to fast. After all the angst and mystery and him getting a panic attack only thinking about leaving his island it's kind of unbelievable to me.

Susan says

Great book! I fell in love with Boaz from page 1. He was just so adorable.. But also very lethal and badass!

Boaz is happy living by himself on a remote island. But he desperately wants to save the almost naked man that washes up his shore one day. That man turns out to be Eric.

Boaz nurses him back to health and the two of them get to know each other. Boaz is very secretive about his past and does not explain why he is all alone on his island, except for the fact that he is in danger. Eric turns out to be an insurance investigator looking for stolen art. He was tracking a stolen painting when the people on the boat he was on wanted to get rid of him and he jumped off the boat to take his chance with the ocean. After a week Eric is all better again and the time has arrived that he has to get off the island and back to his life. And the two of them head out on Boaz' boat. They aren't expecting to run in any trouble, but all of that changes when another boat stops them. It turns out the people after the painting know Eric jumped off the boat with it and want it back...

This book was never dull! It was action packed and still had its tender moments. I absolutely adored Boaz. He was just such a cute killer! ;) He was trained to be an assassin/spy/killer, but he was just so people shy and innocent. And Eric, who never stopped talking, he was funny! When these two finally admit they want each other... so sweet, yet hot!

I am constantly amazed that these free stories are any good, but this one really was!
Go read it!

Cassie Richards says

Right... this was very hard to rate. I didn't really like it, but it's hard to figure out why. It was well written, it was an interesting story.

I think that I didn't really like the characters in the end. Both MCs were a bit annoying. I would definitely read more by this author though, the writing was good.

Rachel Emily says

WOW! I loved this!

I hope when it says "series" in the tags that we can expect more? :D :D I really loved the characters and the

descriptive writing of the island that Boaz was living on. He and Eric were great together, I loved the pace of their romance, nice build up. I really loved this story, thank you!

Debbie McGowan says

I got lucky, as I got to read this at the very end of the author's self-editing and beta-reading process, so it was pretty-damn close to perfect, and that was such a relief for someone like me (hypersensitive to errors).

So the story then: the title is "spot on". This book is a journey from honesty to artifice (and back again), and the characters' struggles to find the courage to open up to each other. The two main characters are vulnerable in their own unique way, and there is such emotional depth that I was sucked right in, and stayed there, in that cabin (it was a bit cold in there, let me tell you!), a grateful voyeur to the relationship that unfolds.

I am a huge fan of character-driven fiction, and this is an outstanding character-led story. There is action, there is mystery, there is danger and suspense. But it is the minutiae of interaction, the journey of discovery, the buds of a relationship that requires so much emotional investment, that makes this such an incredible, enjoyable, wonderful story.

That it is part of a series? Oh yes! Bring it on, S.H. Allan. I can't wait!

Trisha Harrington says

I was honored to be asked by the author to beta read this book. So I've read it a few times now and I definitely fell in love with it more each time.

The pacing was really good. I liked seeing Boaz and Eric's feelings grow as they spent more time together. They were both likable guys, at least I thought they were, so it made me root for them a lot more than I would have otherwise.

This overall story isn't very dark or depressing, but the darkness comes into it a couple of times. Part of it is because of Boaz's past and the things he's seen and experienced. And the other part is how Eric ended up with Boaz in the first place. I definitely think fans of mystery/thrillers or even adventure, would enjoy those aspects of the story.

The ending isn't very final, I know. But this is the first story in a series, so I'm glad everything wasn't wrapped up perfectly. That would probably mean drama for this couple and no, just no. I think they both have had their fair share of issues and they don't need to be destroyed as a couple.

Oh, and more points go to this story because it's well written and it's in first person (I have a thing for first person). So it was definitely my thing and I'm sure a lot of people will really enjoy this story.

Riley says

I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed this one, and would have been perfectly fine paying for it.

Boaz/Eric are sort of an odd couple, but they say opposites do attract. I liked them together, and Eric's constant rambling was almost endearing against Boaz's dry wit.

I noticed the tag, "series", in the beginning and I really hope we get to see more from them, they have so much more to tell us. And while this may possibly be the beginning, it still gave us a satisfying enough HFN ending. I'll be looking for the next one!

Karen Wellsbury says

Thoroughly enjoyed this, has huge potential for more.

Boaz/ Crusoe lives in solitude on an island near Alaska, and discovers Eric washed up one day. He brings him back to his cabin while he recuperates.

Eric should leave the island, but decides to stay, for reasons of his own, and he and Boaz (nicknamed Crusoe by Eric) flirt around each other sharing careful morsels of personal information - Eric more than Boaz, for reasons which become gradually apparent.

Eric coming into his life makes Boaz realise that he wants and needs more from his life, other than isolation on an island - but he has a massive secret in his past, which is hinted at and skirted around throughout. As a reader I felt you needed to put 2 and 2 together to determine most, but not all of his background rather than having it spelt out for you - which I liked.

The relationship between the two develops rapidly, but is rationalised, due to them being alone on the island and in each others company all the time - which worked.

The ending was full on action, not something that I read a great deal of, but it was exciting and 'fitted', it also set the scene for (hopefully) more.

A couple of minor quibbles, to do with logistics mainly, but they are minor.

Another one that I would have paid for, so many thanks to SH Allan for writing what is basically a full lengthener.

Will defiantly read the next instalment (hopefully there will be one).

Chris, the Dalek King says

hmmm...

for the most part I really liked this story. The beginning was a bit confusing (the way it opened and how Boaz talked made it sound like it was a dystopian type story), and Boaz was a tad on the dry side for me. However once Eric got around to not dying, things picked up, and I found his levity really helped balance out Boaz. Sometimes the dialogue got a little choppy, and the villains were a bit too cliche for me, but I think the action sequences were very well written. So overall I really enjoyed the story. (plus seafaring shenanigans

are never a bad thing)

Shame about the painting though...

Oh, I also wished that more of Boaz's past came into play here, but it looks like this might only be the beginning of a series, so I am willing to let that go. And if there is more out of Allen and his two guys here, I will be more than happy to read about it.

This probably lands somewhere around 3.75 stars, but I don't feel too bad about bumping it up to 4.

Plainbrownwrapper says

Okay, so I'm biased -- since the story was written off my prompt -- but I got a lot of enjoyment out of this one.

SH and I have fairly similar tastes -- we both enjoy action and heroes with tortured pasts to go along with our romance -- and it shows here. I thought she did a terrific job of worldbuilding/backstory building throughout the start of the story, and then she followed up with endearing relationship building and nailbiting action to keep us entertained. And -- smart move, given the "An Egan and Atherton" tagline on the cover -- she left plenty of possibilities for future storyline development without leaving any essential plot threads dangling.

My biggest complaint -- and nobody here who has read my reviews will be surprised -- was with the editing. Seriously, editor, commas are free -- use a few every now and then!

All in all, a worthwhile read. I'm giving this one a full 4 stars, and I'll be looking forward to sequels. Gotta see what Boaz's family gets up to!

Thanks for the story!

Cari Z. says

Really 3.5*, rounded up for length. I'm a Castaway, Treasure Island, living in the wilds lover, and so when I started reading this and realized the main character was living on an island all by himself for mysterious reasons, I was definitely intrigued. I liked Boaz, I liked the hints about his dangerous past, I liked him finding Eric and them starting to figure each other out...and then I got derailed, because the story became about Eric's drama, and not Boaz's.

Eric has an interesting enough back story, but we don't get his perspective. The author drops tantalizing hints about Boaz's past, and then we're left with a climax that's...well, let me just say that I know a lot about writing very improbable gun fights, and this one had goons and boats and beatings and was very, well, improbable. I don't mind that so much--heck, I do that too. But it wasn't the ending I wanted, and while I understand that this is a series and we're lucky to get so much story for free, I still walked away from this one going, "Well. Mmkay."

That being said, overall I enjoyed this story. Not every passage flowed beautifully, but some of the descriptions were captivating, and the gradual relationship between Boaz and Eric was sweet. So, 3.5*, and maybe next time we'll learn more about Boaz's past.

Jane A says

[no one came looking for him and tried to actually kill him (hide spoiler)]

Meep says

First off from her bio the author is a really great person, kudos to her and thanks for participating in the event. Unfortunately her writing doesn't work for me, I found this book *incredibly* frustrating which likely makes this review snarkier than it ought to be. Got to about 68% and skimmed a little further.

Positive - Author does her research.

Negative - I've now received a lesson on CPR, rum-runners, boats, mountains, weather, types of driftwood, art, militia cults... I dnf'd so hopefully there's no test at the end!

Talk about time-management - who could do all this in *half an hour* (view spoiler)

Not a big movie fan here; even when I've seen one of the several referenced films the humour was falling flat. You'll either giggle or join me thinking 'What the SHRIMP ever?'

The dialogue all felt unnatural, Boaz/Bozo/Cruiso had an excuse but Eric *with a C* recovered from severe heart stopping hypothermia overnight to come awake fighting, he didn't pause for breath at any point since. I'm no BDSM fan yet ball-gags where starting to have appeal!

Boaz doesn't talk but as the narrator his thought processes circle to infinity - luckily Eric did a college course on psychology so without knowing anything about any of Boaz's history and while claiming *no preconceived*

ideas, he can understand. I have a degree in psychology and I don't understand anything! But I wish my husband would wake up half that alert on a w/e, he's grumpy until at least his second coffee yet Eric whose heart had stopped, wakes all guns blazing and doing Bourne-esk summaries of the room. Go Eric!

Eric is secretive and vaguely sleazy never giving enough that I could like him and Boaz also wasn't saying anything to let you know him, there were hints to his past then a 'but I'm not thinking about that' and I was wanting to shake my kindle PLEASE, think of it, speak of it, give me SOMETHING here. I couldn't see why they suddenly had something special between them.

Simplify or better deliver the plot cutting the lessons to give some real feelz and there's the glimmer of an interesting story. I got this far because I was interested in knowing about Boaz but then the art-caper was just too much. The writing style doesn't work for me there seemed too much going on even when all they'd done was cook and eat a meal and I didn't see a connection.

And the big conundrum if living in a remote cabin with no electricity and no tv how do you watch videos?
Nevermind how you order them - no phone/banking...

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EDIT

I'm told the author did not specifically say video.

I in all honesty and without a shred of artifice read and thought video.

This story now has a lasting bad feel, I rate on feels so it goes from unrated to 1star.

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EDIT 2

Putting this back to 'unrated' as I didn't hate it and my reaction of changing the rating while (very) upset was unfair and has been bugging at me.

Separate to that, the author has class. Respect for that.
