

Currents Deep and Deadly

Arleen Alleman

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Darcy Farthing is a most unlikely detective. But as soon as this 40-year-old blond bombshell finds herself aboard the Sea Nymph cruise ship with Dr. Peter Johnson for a relaxing South American vacation, she is unwittingly swept up in a murderous plot. Luckily, if not coincidentally, the protective embrace of dashing widower Mick Clayton awaits her fall.

The heroine of *Currents Deep and Deadly*, the first in a series of Darcy Farthing novels—featuring good looking wealthy folks haplessly caught up in circumstances beyond their control—has redeemed herself as a professional pharmaceutical saleswoman, after a disastrous marriage that yielded a daughter, whom the indigent Farthing put up for adoption.

As sadness and guilt haunt Farthing, psychological counseling and a newly acquired atheism help her to compartmentalize and cope. Yet her stoicism is compromised when a series of coincidences lead her into the fiendish plot, apparently hatched by heartless zillionaire Paul Denezza and a few of the ship's colorless crew—and plunge her into a sensual longing that challenges everything she has come to believe.

Meanwhile, Sea Nymph Captain Espen Oldervoll, a proud Scandinavian carrying on the heritage of his Viking ancestry, faces a great challenge to his pride—his storybook marriage to the ravishing and exotic Suzanne Moretti is failing. Moretti is cheating on him, according to certain crew member witnesses. The symbiotic friendship between Farthing and Moretti, and its connection to the dangerous Denezza, may detonate before Denezza's mysterious plans see sunrise.

The story is propelled by Farthing overhearing crewmembers and others talk about huge sums of money being exchanged for an as-yet-to-be executed takeover. Clayton, a government investigator, has been undercover on the trail of Denezza, yet Farthing's ongoing failure to directly alert the ship's authorities about the suspicious conversations leads indirectly to the deaths of two crewmembers.

Farthing's preoccupations with finding romance and discounting coincidences make her one of the dimmer bulbs in the detective genre, which would be great if delivered comically, as in "The Pink Panther" movies. With each new criminal revelation, she declares: "My God!"—*there is no God.* Most of her obtuse travel journal entries have nothing to do with the plot: "Rio certainly deserves its reputation for beauty and excitement."

While Alleman writes breathlessly and with interest, the fluffy dialogue suggests a kind of TV soap genre: "He is very wealthy and powerful and also a little ruthless." and "I pretty much gave up on religion or belief in a grand scheme when Beth had the brain tumor and my parents were killed so young by ... a big rock."

Alleman's first novel is a worthwhile read. With better focus, more authentic conversations (people rarely utter four complete, uninterrupted sentences in a row these days), and a plot devoid of false distractions, Farthing's upcoming series could garner a strong romance lovers' following. A brief excerpt of Alleman's second Darcy Farthing tale, *Currents of Vengeance*, is included.

BRANDON M. STICKNEY (June 13, 2011)

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