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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ THRILLER

Deadly Pleasures

Mary Firmin
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Industrious real-estate agent Megan Riley finds herself in a heap of trouble as Mary Firmin's pulse-pounding kinky debut thriller *Deadly Pleasures* opens. Already dogged by a flagging real estate market, pressures to stay sober, a drunken former fiance, and the burden of keeping up with rich female friends at the local yacht club, things only get worse for the intrepid protagonist when she hears that the husband of a member of the yacht club is murdered as a result of an episode of sexual bondage gone awry. People liken his killing to the similar murder of a prostitute months before. Suddenly, bodies are popping up everywhere, and Megan and her friends are scared. As they find themselves drawn deeper into the world of bondage clubs, the question arises: Will they live to see tomorrow?

Firmin writes more like a seasoned storyteller than a debut novelist, making good use of her personal experience as a yacht club member and author of a California society column to create sympathetic nuanced portraits of the wealthy who frequent such clubs while simultaneously poking fun at their eccentricities. All of the characters have good points and foibles, complex back stories, and reasons to keep readers rooting for them. Megan's charm and pluck, insecurities, money troubles, and battle to stay alcohol-free make her an appealing, well-rounded protagonist. The action in the story comes fast and furious, alternating between sexy and lethal, sometimes straddling both extremes at once. Although the graphic descriptions of bondage torture may make some squirm, these detailed depictions of the seedy side of the bondage lifestyle make the gruesome murders all the more chilling.

Furthermore, Firmin's omniscient narration, including from the viewpoints of some victims before their deaths, ratchets up the suspense while eliciting empathy for all involved. The author intersperses sensual tasteful scenes of lovemaking, foreplay, and good old-fashioned dating amidst the blood, guts, and investigation. Well-placed red herrings distract readers from the murderer's identity, so that when it comes, the revelation is both shocking and surprising. The author combines the elements of a romance and murder mystery, resulting in a uniquely compelling cross-genre story.

As an added bonus, *Deadly Pleasures* is a love letter to the natural beauty of the author's home state of California. Firmin describes the landscapes, sunsets, and waters so vividly that readers will want to jump into the setting of the book, regardless of what dangers may await them there.

Deadly Pleasures is recommended for readers who like to be both titillated and entertained. One certainly hopes that the author, an iUniverse Rising Star, has more naughty novels up her sleeve.
JILL ALLEN (January 13, 2012)

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