



The Mountains Bow Down

Sibella Giorello

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Everything's going to work out. Time away always makes things better . . .

That's what FBI Special Agent Raleigh Harmon believes as she boards a cruise to Alaska. A land of mountains and gems and minerals, the Last Frontier is a dream destination for this forensic geologist who's hoping to leave behind a hectic work schedule and an engagement drained of romance.

But when a passenger goes missing and winds up dead, Raleigh's vacation suddenly gets lost at sea. The ship's security chief tries to rule the death a suicide, but Raleigh's forensics background points to a much darker conclusion: Somewhere onboard, a ruthless murderer walks free.

Engulfed by one of her toughest cases yet, Raleigh requests assistance from the FBI and receives her nemesisùhandsome Special Agent Jack Stephanson. As the cruise ship sails through the Inside Passage, Raleigh has five days to solve a high-profile murder, provide consultation for a movie filming onboard, and figure out her increasingly complicated feelings for Jackùwho might not be as arrogant as she originally thought.

And that's only her work life. Family offers even more challenges. Joined on the cruise by her mother and aunt, Raleigh watches helplessly as disturbing rifts splinter her family.

Like the scenery that surrounds the cruise ship, Raleigh discovers a mystery so daunting that even the mountains might bow down before it.

The Mountains Bow Down Details

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From Reader Review The Mountains Bow Down for online ebook

Barbara Brink says

I have read all of the Raleigh Harmon novels and in my opinion they just get better and better. This fourth one in the series was so good I didn't want it to end, but although it is the longest book so far, I knew that Raleigh had to eventually solve the case and get off that cruise ship.

Raleigh and her mother are along for the ride on a cruise with her Aunt Charlotte and Charlotte's crazy psychic friend, who just happens to grate on Raleigh's last nerve every time she's in the room. Raleigh has taken a job as a consultant for a Hollywood movie, and plans to do some rock hunting and hiking on her "sort of vacation." But as you'd expect, someone ends up dying and Raleigh is pulled into solving the murder before the cruise ends and all the suspects get away.

Raleigh is newly engaged, but still unsure of her feelings for the southern gentleman back home, even ignoring his calls and using work as a buffer against dealing with the truth. Her mother is mentally fragile and with all that is going on, Raleigh is not able to keep an eye on her like she normally would, shielding her with lies and evasion to the point that she doesn't like herself very much.

Jack, an FBI agent from her past, flies in to help her with the case, further confusing her feelings about marriage to her fiancé, DeMott.

The Mountains Bow Down is a murder mystery on a cruise ship with self-obsessed Hollywood characters, laugh-out-loud humor, and beautiful descriptions of Alaska and the ocean that will make you want to take your own cruise there, but it also has an emotional depth that sneaks up and pulls at you like a riptide. The character development is awesome to behold, facets of Raleigh's character revealed in the smallest of nuance. Whether tender scenes with her mother, or repartee with Jack—the agent she wants to dislike, we learn a little more about Raleigh and what makes her tick.

(Disclaimer: I was given a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.)

Patricia Kirk says

Raleigh plans to vacation in Alaska with her mother, aunt, and an irritating clairvoyant, to think about her engagement and her ambivalence about it. However, plans change when a woman disappears and then is discovered hanging off the side of the cruise ship.

As an FBI agent, Raleigh realizes that the vacation is over. Additionally, when she asks her office for help, a handsome agent she remembers as a down-putting thorn-in-her-side volunteers to join her. She can't forget the trouble he caused her as a new FBI agent.

Raleigh also must admit that her mother's fragile mental state worsens by the day. She feels responsible for the deterioration. She feels worse when her mother, afraid of her, refuses to see her in the hospital.

This book is for those who enjoy clues and forensics. Raleigh works through the evidence with precision and her conclusions ring true. The author knows forensics, or has a good adviser. The action slows in places. Readers find more a logic puzzle than an action movie--with exceptions.

The background story of family gives truth and interest to Raleigh's character. Though Raleigh is Christian, it doesn't have much to do with the story, although there is nothing a Christian would avoid. Crimes happen off screen without a lot of description. Though one of the villains is a pornographer, the author handles

descriptions of his pornography lightly.

A good novel for those who enjoy unusual facts and detail.

Nora St Laurent says

I was so thankful to receive a review copy of such an exciting, fun, suspenseful, and heartfelt novel. I enjoyed reading about Raleigh, a female FBI agent, who specializes in forensic geology and is good at what she does. Sibella went to school to be a geologist so it's fascinating to read how geology helps Raleigh uncover clues she never would have discovered without it.

I liked how Sibella had Raleigh stay true to her calling in life no matter how the male FBI Agents treated her. I also liked Raleigh's honesty in her feelings and how she struggled in putting God into the driver seat of her life 24/7.

Giorello takes her readers on a beautiful Alaskan cruise along with her mom and eccentric Aunt who has arranged for Raleigh to be a consultant on a movie being filmed on the cruise ship. She thought this would be a great way to enjoy each other's company, have fun and get their trip paid for.

Things were beautiful and fun until Raleigh discovers a female body hanging from the back of the cruise ship. Head of security seeks Raleigh's help in this case because she's FBI and the woman found dead was famous actor Milo's wife.

Milo was the one she was consulting on the film on how to be an FBI agent. Milo and everyone else on this project was hoping for a box office smash hit with this movie. Milo needed this to get back into the game.

Sibella Giorello pens an intriguing web of mystery, suspense, fun and quirky characters I enjoyed with well timed humor. This was a "who-done-it" that kept me guessing right up till the end. This was the first novel I've read by this author, it won't be my last. I think I'll start with *The River Runs Dry*, or *The Clouds Roll!* So many choices! Can't wait to see where this author takes me next!! I highly recommend this book and for you to check out the others!

Disclosure of Material Connection:

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising"

Nora St.Laurent

The Book Club Network www.bookfun.org

The Book Club Network blog www.psalm516.blogspot.com

Book Fun Magazine www.bookfunmagazine.com

Grace says

This book in the series dealt with the seamier side of things with Hollywood and pornography, but it was still a good read. Giorello does some great writing. She develops her characters very well. I listened to it as an audiobook and it was brilliantly done. I laughed out loud so many times. Her timing is perfect.

Nancy says

Entertaining story, although I found the plot twists a little confusing at times. However, this may be due to my habit of listening to text to speech, while I'm doing something else at the same time, rather than the quality of the writing. I found the Christian elements to be fairly "light" in this particular book.

Giovanni Gelati says

It is hump day, Wednesday, for those of us not keeping count. The end of the week for me is just 5 short days away. Wait, then a new week starts again. I need a vacation! Our main character in the novel tried that and her work followed her. Does that mean when I get to take a few days off, some novels, digital short stories and graphic novels are going to follow me? I hope so! The beach wouldn't be the same without them. Fortunately when work follows me on vacation, I love it and get to share it with you. Today's featured author, Sibella Giorella, will be with us in The G-ZONE on April 8th. Here is what is in between the covers on this one:

“Everything's going to work out. Time away always makes things better . . . That's what FBI Special Agent Raleigh Harmon believes as she boards a cruise to Alaska. A land of mountains and gems and minerals, the Last Frontier is a dream destination for this forensic geologist who's hoping to leave behind a hectic work schedule and an engagement drained of romance. But when a passenger goes missing and winds up dead, Raleigh's vacation suddenly gets lost at sea. The ship's security chief tries to rule the death a suicide, but Raleigh's forensics background points to a much darker conclusion; somewhere onboard, a ruthless murderer walks free. Engulfed by one of her toughest cases yet, Raleigh requests assistance from the FBI and receives her nemesis-handsome Special Agent Jack Stephanson. As the cruise ship sails through the Inside Passage, Raleigh has five days to solve a high-profile murder, provide consultation for a movie filming onboard, and figure out her increasingly complicated feelings for Jack—who might not be as arrogant as she originally thought. And that's only her work life. Family offers even more challenges. Joined on the cruise by her mother and aunt, Raleigh watches helplessly as disturbing rifts splinter her family. Like the scenery that surrounds the cruise ship, Raleigh discovers a mystery so daunting that even the mountains might bow down before it. “

This novel is billed as a Christian mystery fiction. I have news for you, this genre of novel rocks. Giorella puts together a first rate thriller here. I haven't read her work before and I have to admit I am bummed by that. I am definitely going to back track to the other novels she has written. The character development was intense, her descriptive ability amazing, and the plotline was engaging and hard to pull away from. Going to Alaska and on a cruise is on Mrs. Gelati and my to do list, but after reading this I may not have to do it, Sibella Giorello made me feel like I had been there. Her descriptive ability made me see, feel and experience all the things that her main character was seeing; I really like that. The romance and the family subplots were nice and kept things a bit tense and helped offer a nice reprieve from the murder and the investigation of it.

Murder doesn't follow everyone on vacation, but books sometimes do. I suggest not only taking this one

with you to wherever your vacation destination is this year, but why not read all her work. After all good is good and fun is fun. Give Siabello Giorella a shot and have The Mountains Bow Down in front of you. What are you reading today? Have you checked out our new blogtalk radio show The G-ZONE? Check us out and become our friend on Shelfari, The Novel Spot & Twitter. Go to Goodreads and become our friend there and suggest books for us to read and post on. Did you know you can shop directly on Amazon by clicking the Amazon Banner on our blog? Thanks for stopping by today; We will see you tomorrow. Have a great day. <http://www.gelatisscoop.blogspot.com>

Tracy says

Solid Suspense in a Phenomenal Setting

FBI Special Agent Raleigh Harmon needed this vacation, but she sure didn't need to get stuck on a ship with 2,000 other people invading her personal space. She's nearly desperate to get into the Alaskan port of Ketchikan and take a hike in the most beautiful landscape she will likely ever see, finding rocks and minerals to add to her collection in this geologist's paradise. Then a trio of deep, bellowing sounds shatters the air and further wrecks her already stressful vacation; three long, deep horn blasts that signal the ship's return to sea. At their mercy, Raleigh watches her hopes for some time alone disappear just as fast as the Ketchikan coastline.

Before she has time to grieve the lost opportunity, the body of a woman presumed lost overboard is found hanging from the side of the ship, and despite the cruise line's official leap to a label of suicide, Raleigh's forensic experience is telling her that there are too many inconsistencies, too many problems with the scene and the evidence to assume the woman's death was anything but murder.

What had been intended as a family vacation with her ailing mother, her aunt, and her aunt's best friend has turned into a high-profile homicide investigation of the producer of the Hollywood film production that had hired her aunt to provide some spiritual assistance to the cast and crew. And as the ship returns to its scheduled route, Raleigh has to deal with the grim knowledge that though the suspect pool is limited to the crew and passengers, the secrets and lies swarming around the crime go deeper than the ocean on which they sail. And she has until the end of the cruise to solve the case before the murderer disembarks and disappears forever.

With a sweeping panorama painted by the words of a true authorial artist and a layered plot of mystery, family crisis, personal challenge, and tests of faith, Sibella Giorella brings readers into the life of Raleigh Harmon and delivers a solid mystery that was thoroughly entertaining. This is the first book I've read by Giorella, and I don't intend it to be my last, and frankly, that surprises me. For several reasons, some of which are personal, I'm not a fan of Christian fiction and I tend to avoid it, but I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads program before I realized it was Christian fiction.

To be completely honest, it was only out of a sense of obligation to rate and review it as part of that program

that made me pick it up once I'd received it. Also to be completely honest, it was the first page that hooked me, and all the subsequent pages that kept me captivated, enthralled, and impressed.

I'm more than a little in love with both Giorello's writing style and her characters, who were all so wonderfully three dimensional and real. Raleigh is a character with the most interesting flaws, but she's also strong, fiercely intelligent, and dedicated to a job that occasionally tries her faith and pushes her into compromising her ethics. Her mother's mental illness weighs on her heart and the actions she takes to protect her mother...and herself...aren't always honest, but she owns them. She's occasionally surly, judgmental, and a bit hot tempered, and she's not exactly dealing with her fiance in the most emotionally mature ways, but she's got the admirable ability to look into herself and acknowledge her flaws. Even when she's not necessarily so willing to work on rectifying them. I found her refreshingly easy to relate to and completely sympathetic as a heroine, despite some differences in ideology. In fact, I just flat-out liked her. And I loved, loved, *loved* Jack.

I'm guessing Raleigh has had a few contentious run ins with Special Agent Jack Stephanson in previous books, because their chemistry had a weight and feel of history to it that speaks loudly of previous development. As I have every intention of continuing this series, I can only hope their relationship continues, because I'm a romantic at heart and I think Jack's much better suited for Raleigh than her childhood sweetheart, no matter how nice a guy he may or may not be. Maybe I'm biased because I started the series here, but the synchronicity between Jack and Raleigh is totally entertaining and made a good story even better. I was particularly happy with Jack in that he adds some touches of levity to the story, lighting up the occasionally too-serious Raleigh, and providing the opportunity for some wonderful witty repartee.

Admittedly, geology, rocks, and minerals aren't really my thing, so there were points in the story when my mind started to wander or the story dragged a bit when Raleigh was hitting the geological high points, and I do wish the suspense and mystery aspects of the plot had come with a few more suspenseful moments. I was deeply moved, though, by Raleigh's struggles with a mother who sees her as a villain, and sympathized with the feelings a child has when she realizes that she's been thrust into the role of being a parent for a parent. I was also deeply grateful that while Raleigh's faith was evident in places throughout the book, it was also quite obviously personal and subtle woven into everyday aspects of her life, seeming more genuine for it, and thankfully, totally lacking in proselytism.

I'm ever so glad to have made the mistake that brought me the gift of Giorello's deft and accomplished storytelling and got me hooked on Raleigh Harmon and her series of crime solving mysteries. I am thoroughly and anxiously looking forward to finding out what comes next for Raleigh, her family, her fiance, and of course, Jack.

Disclosure: This book was received for free through Goodreads First Reads for the purpose of an honest rating. All ratings, comments, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this review are my own.

~*~*~*~

One Good Book Deserves Another

Heather Gilbert says

Sibella is a master at writing mysteries that unfold bit by bit, full of rich descriptions. I enjoyed the cruise ship setting of this one. Raleigh Harmon is one of my fave sleuths with her unflappable approach to things.

Trisia says

I'm so pleased Courtney introduced me to this author. I am devouring her books like a crazed zombie, which I know will end badly when I come to the last book....

I'm opening to the first page right now....I know I'm in for quite a ride.....

Katie says

In this fourth installment to the Raleigh Harmon series the reader is swept into an epic mystery of "who dunit?" From the very beginning - when they found a dead woman hanging over the side of the ship - I knew this was going to be a grand mystery. I was not disappointed. The whole mystery - to figure out who murdered a woman on board and then set it up to look like a suicide - is intriguing. The plot was very well thought out and pretty complex. Towards the end I stopped once or twice to clarify what Raleigh had just discovered. But this didn't keep me from becoming totally enthralled in the book.

I really enjoy Sibella's writing style! It's so relaxed and witty - I love the dry humor she gives Raleigh. I instantly clicked with her in *The Clouds Roll Away* and was looking forward to hearing more of her and DeMott's relationship. I was slightly disappointed in this area, as DeMott is hardly in the book at all. Raleigh's lack of excitement at their upcoming wedding was also a bit disturbing - if she is this unsure before marriage, I don't understand why she is getting married at all. I sympathized with DeMott as he tried to stay connected with her during the voyage, but was continually ignored or shrugged off.

This was my first time meeting Jack, though he has been in a previous Raleigh Harmon novel. His easy-going, flirty, self-assured character was fun to know. A few times I grew annoyed at his "I'm good-looking and I know it" attitude, but he was funny at times with his quirky comments! The way he pushed and pressured Raleigh concerning her engagement was a bit disappointing. He assumed too much. He didn't respect that Raleigh was an engaged woman, promised to someone. My blood would've been boiling at that comment, instantly raising my defenses against this guy. But then again, with Raleigh's insecurities about her engagement already, I can see why Raleigh didn't react too much. In the aspect of Raleigh's love-life, this story ended leaving me very unsure. I am looking forward to the next book in the series and hoping it will clear up some questions.

Because of this certain mystery and Raleigh's line of work, she doesn't always hear or see the most pleasant things. She discovers one suspect has been involved in several affairs, another in drugs, and two others are involved in pornographic filming. In all three events nothing graphic is described besides stating the facts. There was one conversation Raleigh had with the coroner that I need to mention. They speak briefly about a previous case the coroner had with some teen boys accidentally killing themselves. The cause leading up to their death was a subject that might be pretty heavy for some younger teen readers and I would advise caution.

Having just recently become a fan of Sibella's work after I read *The Clouds Roll Away*, I was thrilled when I heard about her newest release. It was even better than the previous book! Even though the ending leaves the reader hanging to some extent, I was still content when I reached the final page. Though there are many

questions I hope her next release, *The Stars Shine On*, will answer. *The Mountains Bow Down* is the perfect book to have handy on your nightstand when you are itching for a good mystery to solve.

Karen says

Would have to be in my top 10 of best book by a Christian author in mystery suspense as a Christian author. Interesting characters I liked and I am hard to please. A relative with mental stuff I can relate to since I have been there. I guessed the culprit wrong also. Loved the setting in Alaska since my 2nd son lives in this area as a boat captain and resort employee. Now I have info to play with him on since I have not been there myself. Great setting for a mystery. I will read all her books in this series if possible and nominate them for my Christian group reads.

C.J. Darlington says

When I got this book in the mail, you should've seen the huge smile on my face. Been looking forward to it for months! I wasn't disappointed. Giorello delved deeper into Raleigh Harmon's character than she has in prior books---her struggles, challenges, and vulnerabilities. She was real before, but this has added a depth to her, which makes for a fantastic story. The plot was a page-turner too. Bravo, Ms. Giorello.

Bex Montgomery says

I sort of put off reading this book. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's just my natural tendency towards procrastination, but I think it was more than that. I'm always a little nervous when picking up title from an author whose work is new to me, as this was. I'm kind of a sucker for female FBI agents in suspense, but I've seen it done enchantingly and well... not so well. I was holding my breath, and tensed a bit as I started this book, not sure which category it would fall into, and literally felt my body relax with relief as I read the first few pages and realized almost instantly this was a book I was going to enjoy reading.

The Writing

Much of my instant connection with the book, had nothing to do with the plot. It was the writing. Sibella Giorello is quite simply a fabulous writer. She is the kind of writer who loves words. She writes tight and smart and imbues her narrative character with the kind of voice that I could have mistaken for my own. There is zero clunkiness to this novel. Nothing to trip you up or take you out of the story, it simply flows. And her writing is original. The book is peppered with authentic descriptions and dialogue that give color to a picture so flawless you feel a part of the action. She never resorts to tired cliche's or sloppy portraiture and I loved her for that. It's not that her style is poetic, as much as disarmingly fresh.

“The nubile Mrs. Sparks climbed the four steps to the edge of ht hot tub, then made a slow descent into the water. Perhaps it was the pile of vanilla hair on her sticklike body, but she reminded me of an ice-cream cone dipping itself in melted chocolate” - {Ch. 6}

She also won bonus point in my geeky book for including words that I actually had to look up. Yes in a suspense novel. Unapologetically, one of the surest ways to my nerdy little heart is to surprise me by letting me learn something! And Giorello did not disappoint on many fronts here. She not only taught me a few words, she taught me about the beauty of Alaska and the working class underbelly of the cruise industry, and she somehow even managed to hold me fascinated by mini lessons in geology.

I was not at all surprised to finish the book and realize that her writing has been nominated for two Pulitzers.

The Concept

FBI Agent Raleigh Harmon from Giorello's earlier novels steps back up for a suspense thriller set aboard an Alaskan cruise. I'm wouldn't call the murder on the high seas concept entirely unique, but it was a story I hadn't read before. In fact, it was one of the things that made me fall in love with the story. I suppose wanted to experience the world of a luxury cruiseliner for a while, and in this the *The Mountains Bow Down* is a breathtaking getaway, even if the trip turns out to be anything but a vacation for our heroine.

The Plot

When the wife of a famous Hollywood action-star filming his latest sequel on the cruise turns up dead, Raleigh's vacation dissolves into a race to find the killer and recover evidence before the cruise ends and all her suspects walk off free. She is reunited with Jack Stephanson, another agent who she thought she couldn't stand. The plot threw quite a few twisty surprises at me. Everything that could possibly go wrong for poor Raleigh including many things I couldn't have anticipated going wrong, did. Again, this was a tight mystery plot that surprised me in its ability to keep one step ahead of me in my quest for whodunnit.

The Characters

This book is worth a read for the characters alone. Especially Raleigh and Jack, but also her wacky extended family and many of the cruise line employees. There is a lot of originality here. The characters are well-developed and unique for the most part. A few of the Hollywood types came off a little clichéd to me, especially compared to the excellent complex characterization of almost every other character in the book. They had a few quirks, yes, but it still felt a bit like typecasting to me. That said, her mother and the story line there was well done and compelling, and I felt like the ships employees including Geert, head of security were well done. I have to say also, in my mind I kept reverting to characters from *Bones* as I was reading this. Jack was Agent Booth in my mind and while Raleigh wasn't quite a Temperance, she was more feisty and innocent, I saw her as Hannah. A few other characters slipped in as well, and in fact it kind of felt like I was reading one long episode of the show. Let me make it clear this is not a bad thing in my mind, folks. *Bones* is one of the best shows on television in my not so humble opinion and has by far the most interesting characters you are likely to come across in prime time. Giorello's characters gave me that super cool, quirky and fascinating vibe I love from the show.

Christian Suspense

I did just want to mention that this is considered a Christian suspense work. It's not something I am usually drawn to, but Giorello is not at all blatant in making this a Christian work. It is a clean read, certainly, with a character in possession of a strong moral compass, and a set of beliefs through which she views the world. But, it is first and foremost an excellent mystery. Second, perhaps a character drama. As we get closer to the end she drops in a few narratives from Raleigh that make her beliefs more overt, but you also get the sense that while our heroine is unwavering in her faith, she is struggling, human. It struck a nice balance for me.

I know that some have come to this book looking for it to be an affirmation of faith and find it sparse on the "God is Great" front. It was the right choice for this story. Even the times that she does subtly push the

character's spiritual thoughts to the forefront feel a little out-of-place against all the action here. I felt a touch uncomfortable with it, as I did with the ever so slight characterization of those who had other belief systems, or were more human in their frailties as either crackpots or morally bankrupt, while her beliefs were certainly never challenged. It was true faith, less rational than most FBI agents portrayed in fiction, but I'm decidedly not the target Christian demographic and I could easily accept it as part of Raleigh's character. I was certainly nowhere close to feeling pushed away from finishing the book, which is another testament to the writing. Ultimately this is not a story about faith. It is a mystery, and adding too much of the character's opinions on the subject might have made her come across as self-righteous and preachy. I appreciated the subtlety.

The Wrap Up

Overall, this is an engaging read and a satisfying mystery. It's not groundbreaking, but it's a world I wouldn't hesitate to recommend suspense lovers lose themselves in for a little while. It's also worth a read for the strongly developed quirky characters, and the simply fabulous, smart writing style. I'll definitely be looking for Giorello's next book in the series, *The Stars Shine On* due early next year.

Review Copy Courtesy of Litfuse Publicity

This may be partial text of the review originally appearing on Aurelia {Lit}

Jacque Stengel says

What a fun read with lots of characters and mystery with some romance thrown in! The humor is really what got me into the story, but seeing more of Alaska through the MC eyes was a great addition to the story. While this is considered a Christian book, the book is not preachy at all and actually could be shelved under general fiction. It wasn't a page turner for me and I was able to figure out the mystery pretty easily but the book was just fun to read and would recommend to anyone looking for something a little more laid back than the current fad of psych thrillers.

Thank you to Netgalley and Thomas Nelson for providing this copy in exchange for an honest review.

MC says

Sometimes there is a book that can really confuse you to read. You're simply not sure how to react to it. Did the book have a point, beyond event the story? And if so, did it make that point? Was the point real? Or just tacked on so the book can sell better?

To be honest, all of these questions swarmed around in my head as I was completing this novel. In *The Mountains Bow Down*, by Sibella Giorello, the above questions arose for me. In the story, the main character, Raleigh Harmon, is a mineralogist, a geologist who specializes in studying minerals, and she is an FBI agent. She has a somewhat complicated backstory that precedes this novel, but winds up as the story begins, on a cruise with her Mom, her Aunt Charlotte, and Charlotte's extremely eccentric friend, Claire.

Raleigh is hired to be the official FBI consultant on a film project taking place on the cruise ship. During the early part of the voyage, the wife of the movie's star winds up dead. From there, as they say, the mystery thickens.

Several threads are woven together in this book. From Raleigh's turbulent relationship with her fiance, to her strained relationship with her family. Her mother is always at the point of a psychological breakdown, while Aunt Charlotte and Claire are into ridiculous new agey garbage, that becomes increasingly a way to try to evade the enormous pain and loneliness that they feel.

At first, I was looking for an overt Christian message, but couldn't find one. I mulled over if this was good or not. Too many authors put in some evangelistic message to appear "Christian" for the publisher's check lists or whatever, but the message makes no sense with the plot. It sometimes seems like a "Now You Know" segment from the GI Joe cartoons I'd watch as I kid. About two-thirds of the way through the novel, Raleigh does, indeed, cry out to God for help.

I was somewhat taken aback by this, thinking the "Now You Know" had come after all, much to my disappointment. It *seemed* to come out of nowhere. As the story progressed, however, I found that I was wrong. Within the numerous plot elements, the story makes perfect sense.

We are shown how the heroine is unable and unwilling to condemn others when not angry, because of her numerous sins. We are also shown that perhaps, just perhaps, those who do that which we would normally consider ridiculous, rocks, and New Age stuff, are just as lonely and searching as the rest of us. To condemn their evil is a must, of course, for they dabble in what the Lord hates; but to show them love and a desire to help them is also a must. God holds out the hammer of His wrath to those who reject Him (as we all do as sinners), but He also holds out His arms as a loving Father to draw His children to Himself, if we will only turn from our sins and to Him.

In the end, this book did not fall into the trap of having a convenient Gospel message that seemed almost pointless in the structure of the story. There was no "Now You Know" segment here. There was a deep, thoughtful, engaging narrative, with fleshed-out characters and situations, as well as a deep Biblical message.

Of course, there is a romance. Didn't really think you'd avoid that one, now did you? ;) Thankfully, it is tastefully done, and is left open-ended for future books. There is so much more characterization about relationships, how people should and should not treat each other, and so forth. Plus the story is actually compelling, and a good mystery. I usually figure out the bad guy right away when I read a mystery. Here I didn't figure the bad guy out until near the end.

Were there deficiencies in the narrative? A few. The ending seemed a little rushed. Which was a disappointment. The clues were all there and developed patiently over the course of the story, so it seemed to me like the author was simply trying to cram all of this story into a limited page space. For that matter, the interactions of Raleigh, and her fiance, DeMott, made neither seem very sympathetic. I'm trying to decide if that was the point of the author in the first place, or not.

All that said, this book, while not Sherlock Holmes, is a delightful treat to read, with a positive and compelling Christian message about salvation and how to love and reach out to our enemies, with the hopes of winning them to the Lord. Recommended.

I received this book for free from Thomas Nelson Publishers. I am obligated to read it and give a review on my blog and on a commercial web site such as Amazon.com. Thomas Nelson emphasizes their desire for honest reviews, whether positive or negative, in order to help them create a better product. The opinions above are my honest viewpoint. I want to thank Thomas Nelson Publishers for allowing me to review this

book, and thank you all for reading this.
