

# *Currents of Vengeance*

## *Chapter 18*

January 2, 2009  
The *Sea Nymph*

*The same, yet so different!* That thought careened around in my head as I stepped onto the *Sea Nymph* and looked around. I hesitantly crossed the eight-foot-wide deck and approached the double glass doors leading into the ship. A powerful disorientation literally swept me to one side, causing me to grab for the outside wall next to the doors. Taking a moment to recover my cool, I bent over as if looking for something I had lost. After an embarrassing moment, I regained my composure and stepped to the side and back into the flow of excited passengers jostling to enter the ship.

I didn't even have to look around to recall the opulent surroundings. The floors and walls covered with granite and marble slabs, the brass and teak wood trim, and the modern art décor were apparently imprinted on my brain as if this was a home away from home. Disconcertingly, the familiar surroundings actually provided some sense of safety. At the same time, flashes of Suzanne's horrific attack on us—like out-of-context bits of video—pricked at the edge of my consciousness like tiny lightning bolts. *What am I doing back here?*

I had to keep walking to prevent my fellow cruisers from stepping on my heels. At the first opportunity to turn away from the crowd I darted onto the beautiful and aching familiar star-patterned mosaic wood dance floor and headed for the Center Bar. This was the place where I had met Mick, and it had become our favorite hangout . . . despite the horrific death that took place here.

I had just flown in from Colorado where I spent the past two weeks. Rachael was flying up from Buenos Aires and should be on the ship by now, and Mick and Tom were flying in from DC. They were supposed to meet us here at the bar before 5:30, when the ship was scheduled to leave port. It was 4:00 and I was deciding to go find our stateroom and unpack some of my things while I waited. But suddenly, there was Manuel Delgado standing behind his bar as if he, or rather I, had never left.

Quickly revising my plan, I stepped up to one of the nine teal and brown-patterned bar stools arranged in front of the pleasingly curved light wood bar. Manuel looked up, and it took only an instant for his dark features to lighten up with recognition. That smoldering Latin face, which I found so romantic and appealing, brightened with a wide grin.

"Darcy, you are back!" I cannot believe you are here after all the terrible things that happened to you on this ship. Is Mick with you?" He glanced over my shoulder.

Manuel still sort of took my breath away and I laughed, more at myself than anything. It just seemed so strange to be back here. "Coming back to the *Sea Nymph* is something I would never have believed," I said as I dropped my carry-on bag onto the stool beside me. "Believe it or not, Mick and Tom Smythe will both be here to do a little work for the government, and I'm along for the ride."

His expression drooped a little and took on a look of bewilderment. "Tom Smythe, the former security chief, will be on this cruise? I know he lost his position because of what happened, and many crew members are very angry with him for making accusations against poor Captain Oldervoll."

"Oh, is that right, Manuel? They blame Tom for what happened? I am so sorry to hear that. He's a wonderful man and has only tried to determine the truth about what happened. You know about that last night, right, including Suzanne's attack on us?"

"Of course, we all heard about Suzanne, and it was hard to imagine how mentally ill she must have been. But no one wants to believe the captain killed anyone. They wish Tom would keep quiet about it."

"That is not good to hear, Manuel, because Mick and Tom are going to be asking members of the crew about some details related to what happened. Now you are worrying me about how that will go."

I tried to enjoy the remainder of my conversation with Manuel and stayed away from the events of the earlier cruise. I explained that Rachael would also be joining us, and he said he would be very happy to meet her. While we talked, I began to relax with the realization that even if Tom and Mick met resistance from the crew, this could be a calm pleasant vacation for Rachael and me. I lectured myself; we are so fortunate to be traveling on this luxury cruise ship with the opportunity to visit so many exotic seaports along the way. The thought occurred that I just needed to keep telling myself that.

## Chapter 19

Time flew as I enjoyed an update on Manuel's family in Cartagena. I almost felt as if I knew his wife, Juliana, and their two children from our past conversations. Next to Tom, Manuel was the crew member Mick and I had gotten to know the best, and we both considered him a friend.

When five o'clock came and went and no one had joined me, Manuel could tell that I was getting a little anxious. After declaring the bar open he grinned at me and said, "Darcy, would you like your first Kettle One martini of the cruise, extra dry and slightly dirty with olives?"

"Wow, you even remember my favorite drink. Yes, why not? I'm sure Mick and Tom will be here any minute, since the ship is about to sail." I hoped I was right.

At that moment, I saw Manuel's expression change to surprise and something like amusement. I followed his stare to see Rachael struggling with a large rolling duffel bag as she made her way across the dance floor. She looked amazing in a simple long-sleeved hot pink cotton dress that draped her lithe body beautifully, ending about six inches above her knees. With her three-inch platform sandals she stood over six feet tall. She straightened up when she saw me and smiled broadly as she quickened her pace.

I had not seen her for nearly three months, and I stood to receive her into my arms, lightly kissing her cheek. This simple gesture held a world of meaning for me. For so many years I had no reasonable hope of ever seeing my daughter again, much less holding her against my body. I loved her so deeply that losing her at eighteen months had almost killed me, even though it had been my decision . . . but that is another story. Then I turned to Manuel. "This is Rachael. You know the story of how we were reunited during the last cruise."

Manuel gaped at me and then at Rachael. He caught himself and laughed. "I am happy to meet you, Rachael. Darcy told me all about you during the last cruise. I'm sure I am not the first to be amazed at how much the two of you look alike." Then he looked at me with a familiar impudent grin. "Darcy, you know you do not really look like Rachael's mother . . . more like an older sister."

"You are very kind, Manuel. I was quite young when she was born," I giggled.

Rachael seated herself on the stool beside me and asked Manuel for a glass of water. "Where is Mick?" she asked, swiveling toward me.

"I'm sure he will be here any minute . . ."

"Yeah, any minute now," Mick announced from behind us.

I jumped down and threw my arms around his neck as I nodded to Tom who was coming up behind him. "I was beginning to wonder if you two missed your flight or something. I'm so glad you are here."

"No, we just cut it a little close, I guess." Mick turned to Rachael and kissed her cheek. "How was your flight from Buenos Aires, Rachael?"

"It was long but uneventful. Thanks for asking, Mick. How are you Tom?" she asked over Mick's shoulder.

"Better all the time, thanks. I feel almost back to normal."

Manuel now held out his hand. "Hello, Mr. Smythe. It is good to see you again. Have you been ill?"

“It’s Manuel, right?” Tom shook his hand enthusiastically. “Yes, it is good to see you. So you are still here with World of Seas; good for you. I have mixed feelings about being back here myself, but it is good to see a familiar face. As to your question about my health, I’m afraid I had a little mishap, but I’m fine now.”

Mick also reached out to shake Manuel’s hand. “Good to see again, Buddy. We sure spent some long hours sitting here working on fixing the world’s problems, didn’t we?”

“I guess that is true. Now and then there are guests who become much more than fleeting passengers. I have really enjoyed knowing you both, and I am so happy that you have returned.” He nodded to Mick and me.

We all sat at the bar then and caught up on the events of our lives over the past couple of weeks. Everyone was surprised and pleased at how well my book was doing. I had just completed a tour of signings at three Colorado Barnes and Noble stores, where I sold hundreds of books.

Rachael had just competed in a rowing event at the University of Buenos Aires and placed second out of forty in a singles two-oar scull. She was still clinging to her dream of joining an Olympic crew. I had a moment of sadness as I tried to reconcile her dream with her plan to move to the United States. She was going to have to make some difficult decisions when her folks move to their new post in Africa.

Of course, Mick and Tom had been fully engaged in planning their role in the GAO assignment and had not had time for much else. That was pretty much all Mick had on his mind, and just as we were enjoying a friendly discussion, he leaned over the bar toward Manuel and lowered his voice to a loud whisper.

“So, Manuel, we are wondering if you have any knowledge about what happened on the cruise last year. I mean, for example, did you hear about any crew members having an arrangement with the passenger named Paul Denezza that might have led to the deaths?”

This abrupt questioning seemed very inappropriate and really annoyed me. Manuel was obviously and understandably distressed, but he tried to maintain his practiced friendly demeanor.

“No Mick, I have heard nothing except that Suzanne attacked you and Tom arrested her. I have not heard anyone say they know what happened.” He squared up a stack of cocktail napkins then looked back up at Mick. “The only thing is, some American police—maybe the FBI—came on board in Miami and questioned a few crew members, but I don’t know anything about that. Nothing bad has happened on any cruises over the past year, and mostly, we just want to forget all of it.”

At least Mick recognized Manuel’s discomfort, since he is not normally a totally insensitive guy. “I’m sorry, Manuel, I shouldn’t have asked you. We’ve come back to find out once and for all what really happened and how the crew members’ deaths relate to what happened with Suzanne.”

“No problem,” Manuel said with one of his ready smiles. Just keep in mind that I, for one, know nothing about nothing, OK? You want another Corona, Mick?”

