



The Perfect Stranger

P.J. Kavanagh

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First published in 1966, this extraordinary memoir has collected a passionate band of devotees.

Written with a poet's precision, it is a funny, absorbing and brilliantly portrayed rite of passage – from school playing fields to war's battlefields, holiday camps to writers' hang-outs, Brighton to Paris, Korea to Oxford, Barcelona to Jakarta ...

Driving the narrator is a desire to recount the effect of a singular young woman; the love of her and the loss of her.

A joyous and movingly wise evocation of youth, travel and love; those moments of maximum brilliance, at the edge of possibility.

The Perfect Stranger Details

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Author : P.J. Kavanagh

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From Reader Review The Perfect Stranger for online ebook

Laura-Ann says

I won this book via a Goodreads giveaway.

Prior to reading this book I had never heard of P. J. Kavanagh, but that doesn't take away from the book at all. It seems like he led quite an interesting young life.

There's a chapter about his time in Korea which is written as a stream of consciousness - at first it may seem hard to read, but it really does bring the situation alive to the reader. The most touching part is the final couple of chapters when he's talking of his wife. This was particularly close to my heart as I have some idea how he feels about having met his equal and the affect that such a relationship has on a person. This has happened to me, but it's not something people really talk about. People are very happy to gush about people being "lovely" or whatever, but no-one writes anything profound anymore.

Even if you haven't heard of Kavanagh, it's definitely worth reading if just for the analysis of relationships and an individuals place in the world - particularly now knowing it!

Charlene says

I received a copy of this book for free via Goodreads giveaways.

An enjoyable and entertaining, well-written read. I particularly liked the excerpts from Kavanagh's poetry and the contrast between his experiences of war and the romance of Oxford is palpable. The end of the book is heart-breaking.

Michelle says

I won this book on a goodread giveaway. A quaint english account of a young males exploits during and just after war time. Likeable characters and a good wholesome read Many Thanks

Kelly Burr says

I won this book through a good reads giveaway.

Firstly, this was not a book that I felt compelled to read, you know the kind, the real page turners that you cannot put down and before you realise it, you are still reading the darn thing at 1 am.

The story caught my attention and I really wanted to finish it but the authors style was not my usual bedtime reading. I found it challenging.... if I was laying on a beach in the middle of the day I could probably of got to grips with it more.

All in all this is a great memoir of the authors life which I did enjoy but cannot say much more than that. Thank you for the opportunity to read it.

Amna Waqar says

I won this book through a Goodreads Giveaway.

Written in 1966, 'The Perfect Stranger' is a memoir of the early years of Kavanagh's life. I found this to be quite odd, but later realised that he had written this due to the death of his young wife, Sally. "This is my memorial to what happened between us...The rest of my life, any sense I can make of it, is a memorial to that." But, if only his memoir had more of his marriage to Sally in it, I may have found it actually interesting to read. Instead, he waffled on about his entire life, leaving the few mentions of Sally right towards the end.

Kavanagh talks his readers through the Blitz, his school years in Barnes and Switzerland, serving his country in Korea (where he was injured), college life , his marriage to Sally and then moving to Indonesia; and ultimately Sally's sudden death.

As much as I was disinterested in his life, I do feel that he wrote some poignant lines:
"My marriage was my reason for life. I had found what I needed, not an extension of myself (by any means) but my counterpart." You cannot help feel sorry for him at the end of the book.

Chris says

I received The Perfect Stranger by P.J. Kavanagh for free through Goodreads Firstreads giveaway.

I think this book is a love it or hate it book, there seems to be no middle ground. I ask myself why did I not enjoy it? It was a rambling tale in 'bitty' episodes. I could not relate to or empathise with any characters. In a word, I was bored. Sorry.

Maureen says

This was a Goodreads Giveaway. I loved this book - particularly like true stories and this was a true love story - sometimes happy and sometimes sad - but I really felt as though I was PJK as he went through all the ups and downs of his life. A very enjoyable read.

Jason RB says

an incredibly sweet book, with an ending that is the literary equivalent of a baseball bat to the balls.

Jennifer Moville says

having received this book from Good Reads First Reads I was intrigued to try something a bit different than the books I usually read. How I wish I hadn't. Far from actually knowing who PJ Kavanagh actually was I found this to be a very rushed book about the start to finish of a life of a man who could have been any one. As the book went on I found the chapters never really got me enthralled nor excited to know what the man did next and although I finished the book to the last page it is not one I would care to read again. The stories from childhood about his life at school through to life in different countries for all sorts of reasons did not grab my attention

Veronica says

P J Kavanagh kept popping up as a minor character in other memoirs I read, and I've also read Rosamond Lehmann's *The Swan in the Evening*, her memoir of the death of her daughter Sally at the age of 24, and her subsequent psychic experiences. Then *Slightly Foxed* had a review of Kavanagh's own memoir of his early life, so I mooched it.

Kavanagh was a poet, so the prose is rich and full of lovely aphorisms. The part about his Korean war experience is written as a stream-of-consciousness short story, but there's also a lot of humour in his account of the class-ridden idiocies of army life, and of his various attempts to earn a living. Picking a piece at random, I loved his account of the two copy editors he discovered during a stint working in publishing, like something out of *Gormenghast*:

... you found yourself wandering through these high, silent store-rooms, and up the side of one of the most deserted there ran a set of rickety library steps. At the top of these, in a kind of crow's-nest, lived two charming crow-like men. [...] They lived in a blizzard of typewritten paper, pecking into it with their noses, their clothes yellow with age, their eyes yellow, with the angry voracity of birds. They twittered to each other, darting indignantly about in their tiny space among half-finished crusts and scummy tea, passionately pointing out, pages flying everywhere, how this author had italicised a word on page twenty-seven and on page four hundred and six -- would you believe it? -- had spelled the very same word in roman letters!

Throughout his experiences as a Butlin's redcoat, a journalist, broadcaster, educator with the British Council, he never really feels as if he fits in, is always searching for more. The last quarter of the book recounts his wonder at meeting and marrying Sally, his kindred spirit. A short, quick read.

John Naylor says

I received this book for free via Goodreads First Reads.

It is a hard book to rate and review. It is a memoir of the author's early life up until an event surrounding his

first wife. I found it interesting that for what others have described as a love story, the woman he fell in love with wasn't even mentioned until two thirds of the way through the book.

His early life was interesting. He was also lucky with the opportunities he was handed. He provides a snapshot of post WW2 life in many countries and tells his views of them all. It was a pleasure to read for the most part yet never get completely enthralling.

It is understandable in hindsight why he glossed over the most important life event in the story but it did leave the ending feeling a little bit rushed. I feel the book has a historical importance but doesn't quite deserve to be called a modern classic.

3 stars. Worth the read.

Kate says

"The early years of poet P.J. Kavanagh's life -- which took him from a Butlin's Holiday Camp to Switzerland and Paris, to a battlefield in Korea, to Oxford and Barcelona, and finally to Java -- made little sense to him, until 'something extraordinary happened': his meeting with Sally, 'the perfect stranger'.

This tender, funny and quite unsentimental record of the uniqueness of human love is as much a celebration of joy -- despite its abrupt and shocking conclusion -- as it is a poet's tribute of thanks.

~~back cover

This book "made little sense to me", at least until the end, which was the outcome I had anticipated all along, but reached in a way I least expected until the very end. Up until that time, it was just the self-absorbed agonizing of a bright undergraduate trying pompously to discover the meaning of life and the meaning of his life. We've all gone through it, haven't we? But of course the process -- accompanied by excess verbiage and vocabulary straight from the OED -- is boring as anything to anyone but the person wallowing through it. And that was the plot of the first two-thirds of the book. And last third was slightly redeeming, which is why I gave it two stars instead of only one.

Lois Tuffield says

I was told that this book is a 'must' for anybody who grew up in the sixties - a book, like On The Road, that is 'cult' for that era. I was disappointed. The actual story, the love story that is described on the cover, doesn't really start until the last quarter of the book. It's a memoir, a genre which I like, but it doesn't do a lot for me.

Jennifer says

I received this book as part of Good Reads First Reads

Having read on the cover that this book was a memoir I was looking forward to deep tales of the person's life and the way it shaped him into becoming the man he turned into.

From following from the days of schooling through boarding school and then the army and onwards into a civilian life I found the tales to be a bit dull. Nothing in the book really grabbed my attention. Maybe

because it was squashed into just over 200 pagesbut then again the book might have been worse if the stories were drawn out more - it may have been best to choose more specific moments and tell those stories properly.

Not a book I would read again although if you actually knew who PJ Kavanagh was then maybe you will enjoy this book

David Stubbing says

"The Perfect Stranger" is an interesting and well written book. It holds attention almost all the way through, but I felt that it was just too detailed towards the end, but I suppose this was necessary in view of the final pages. It is a book that should be widely read. Recommended
