



Too Close to Miss

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Mara Cunningham knew that sleeping with a married man was a bad idea. But when her lover shows up in the hospital after his wife and son are murdered, the rumors about her turn dangerous. Now she's the prime suspect in a double homicide, and the real killers will stop at nothing to silence her. Mara's race against time takes her from the dense heart of Boston to the dark woods of New Hampshire, from gritty streets to the halls of power. Before she's through, she'll learn just which of her friends she can trust - and she'll stare death in the face.

Too Close to Miss Details

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From Reader Review Too Close to Miss for online ebook

JC says

Picked this up from Amazon for free, and was pleasantly surprised at how much I really enjoyed it. The book starts out at a fast pace and doesn't slow down. The writing was perfect by any means, but I found the storyline quite compelling. I'd recommend this book if you're into mystery novels.

Peter says

Believe it or not, but once upon a time, crime fiction was a lefty genre. As the genre shifted in the 1920s and '30s from the genteel amateur detectives of Doyle and Christie to the more hardboiled mode we're familiar with, it was injected with social realism that used real-world class struggles and oppression for framing and dramatic tension. Figures like Dashiell Hammett (an ex-Pinkerton who went left so hard he wound up on the blacklist), Ray Chandler, James Cain, Chester Himes, and many more cranked out genuine classics that were highly popular and conveyed a hard-hitting social critique without sacrificing story by becoming didactic (even when they could have used some education- see their attitudes towards gender). It was honestly something of a miracle.

Of course, nothing that good could last. Mickey Spillane came along and hijacked the genre tropes for his (to use Mike Davis's phrase) "sado-McCarthyite" potboilers. Joseph Wambaugh, Jack Webb, and their imitators colonized (and cross-fertilized, and saturated) TV and the paperback market with their fatuous good-cop fantasies. Eventually, the crime-fiction right got its own genius with James Ellroy, but that was much farther down the line, and by that point, crime fiction in general wasn't what it was.

My friend and comrade John Perich is doing his bit to bring the tradition back with his Mara Cunningham stories. His first novel, "Too Close To Miss," treads in familiar territory -- gritty Boston crime-land, which Dennis Lehane and his various imitators have been dishing up to us for a good thirty years now -- but finds some new paths. We have many of the familiar tropes- the flawed hero, Mara, a photographer who enters into the action because of an affair with a married man; the web of corruption in which the local gangsters are in many respects the least reprehensible element; sexualized danger; urban blight contrasted with hollow gentrified urban glitz. There's some first-time-novelist hiccups but a good solid frame (and some tense, well-described mayhem).

But as the story picks up and the pieces fall together, we get something a little more, the same sort of thing which made Chandler something other than a dude with a clean prose style (and some bad stereotypical depictions of people outside his demographic). It's not the "social consciousness" that delivers tedious lectures- it's a way of looking at the violence and hierarchy undergirding the whole social structure, the grime and the glitz just the same. It's not that the bad guys aren't bad, aren't just as grotesquely sociopathic as the Lehane model of crime fiction, based in individual psychopathology (aided by an uncaring social system) would have us believe. It's that our system is built structurally to enable the petty, individual sadism of powerful men- gendered pronoun used advisedly. The mystery Mara finds herself in is all about money, but money isn't just money. It's power, and at its best, crime fiction can illuminate power -- its manifestations, its abuses, what it does to all of us -- with a higher intelligence-to-pedantry ratio than just about anything else. I'm excited to see what the next books in the series do with it. ****

Tom says

A fast-moving noir thriller with style to spare. Mara Cunningham is an appealing protagonist, who manages to keep her head even when she's in way over it. Too Close to Miss sends her on a ride through Boston, uncovering the details of the attempted murder of her lover (and the successful murder of his wife and son). Too Close to Miss is an exciting and engaging debut novel, worth reading both by fans of the genre and those who would like to give it a try.

Norma Budden says

At times, I dared not breathe while reading Too Close to Miss, a title which you'll find has a few connotations after you've read the last page.

I can imagine John Perich writing his book with one or, possibly, two sentences as the summary of what will happen - but the story I embarked on fed my imagination throughout the day and into the wee hours of the morning. I couldn't get enough of this mystery.

A lawyer's wife and 5-year-old son had been murdered, the lawyer having sustained injuries which put him in the hospital. He was grieving but was also consumed with guilt of an affair he had carried on with Mara, a newspaper reporter, even though it had ended nearly a year prior to his family being killed.

When he disappeared from his home without contacting anyone, Mara decided to investigate. Feeling a level of guilt all her own, she was determined to bring justice to the murderer but, in the process, a series of events made her the prime suspect. When she got to the bottom of everything, surprising facts came to light but, as for the murderer, my initial suspicions were correct.

Even so, there were times I second-guessed myself simply because John Perich has a way of telling a story which makes anything seem possible.

A terrific read I'd recommend to mystery lovers everywhere.

Dava Stewart says

When I can figure out what is going to happen in a thriller/suspense novel, it's a wee bit disappointing. So, it bummed me out when I figured out whodunit fairly early on, but there was enough going on that I didn't get too bored.

I found it odd that the main character, who is smart and pretty and generally liked, has virtually no friends other than one or two who were actually friends of her married lover and who she probably shouldn't have even known on a personal level. It is also laughable that a person who could kill a life long friend and a five year old child would hesitate even momentarily before killing ANYONE.

This is a light weight, entertaining book that you don't really want to think too much about. Good for car rides and such.

Nikki Fordey says

I get a kick out of stories set in Boston as I've lived here for several years. Unfortunately, the delightful details of my favorite city were not enough to keep me fully interested in this book. It is a quick read and the prose is well written, but the plot was slow to develop. I found it difficult to relate to the narrator. So much of the story relies on the reader caring about the narrator's fate and thus this was not an out of the park home run for me. I was also disappointed at the ending in that it seemed very rushed and the long monologue by the narrator recapping everything felt like an insult to my ability to figure out the story for myself. That's not to say there is no merit to the story. I was captivated by Mr. Perich's language choices and did enjoy his playfulness with words. When the tension was particularly high I did get sucked into the story- it just wasn't the constant satisfaction that I'm used to with thrillers. I would recommend this book to people who are looking for a local interest book with plenty of (non gratuitous) violence and intrigue that doesn't require a significant time commitment. It is certainly worth its current price as an ebook.

Bryan says

Disclaimer 1: The author is an online acquaintance. I like his blogging/commentary and I fully expected this book to be well written.

Disclaimer 2: I hate thrillers. I have had difficulty making it through Ludlum, Forsythe, etc. I especially hate thrillers with no politics and no threat of nuclear explosions.

Combining the two disclaimers, I expected to say that this was a really well written thriller that would be enjoyed by people who like thrillers, but that I was not one. Much to my surprise I found myself staying up last night until eleven (which is really late for me these days) to finish this book. No thriller will ever be Shakespeare; the modern genre just isn't built for that. But Perich here combines a deep knowledge and clear affection for his Boston setting with some enjoyable but human characters that are as well developed as thriller characters can be, and adds a pretty good plot. My criticisms amount to nitpicks: I didn't quite understand the motivations of one villain, and I thought another was a bit over the top, but for a thriller, that's high praise indeed. There are no nuclear explosions, and only a touch of politics, but it worked for me. If you are a thriller fan you will like this book, and if you aren't, like me, you may just like it anyway.

Mike says

A compelling, incisively smart, and witty thriller; in some ways comparable to Lawrence Sanders' work in its balance of character arc, plot, and immersion in a particular city (in this case, Boston). The story takes about two chapters to grab your interest fully, at which point you'll be hooked to the finish. Among the book's virtues is a legitimately likeable (yet imperfect) protagonist, a richly evocative setting, and a number of legitimately surprising plot twists which are nonetheless perfectly logical in retrospect. The author also offers a narrative device wherein the protagonist periodically synthesizes what she's learned about the mystery so far; this helps the reader from feeling lost at sea if s/he forgets some details along the way. The low price is

in some senses unfortunate as it understates the book's unusually high quality, but this should encourage you to take the plunge with this new author.

Boots S says

Mara Cunningham is a photographer for the Tribune and meets and sleeps with Daniel, a high profile lawyer (and married). At 2 AM, she receives a call that Daniel has been shot and is in the hospital. His wife and child were killed. Daniel leaves the hospital to attend the funeral and then disappears. Mara starts an investigation. She is assaulted (her assailant is hurt more than she), she is locked in a basement, but escapes; she is kidnapped, tied to a bed, but manages to strangle her kidnapper. But she keeps delving into the mystery until she is finally shot, but after she solves the plot. Although the tale kept moving, I found Mara too super to believe. She manages to outwit the police, lawyers, etc.

Flannery says

Full disclosure: The author is a friend of mine. It also takes place in Boston. Those two things would automatically earn any book two stars.

But this book doesn't need my pity stars. It's earned all 4 on its own merits.

It's fast, it's tight, it's exciting. I couldn't put it down. The protagonist is a believable, likeable, flawed protagonist. The fight scenes, the tight spots (both figurative and literal), and the vulnerable moments leap off the page in vivid detail. Perich's Mara Cunningham could easily hang with the likes of Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Perri O'Shaughnessy's Nina Reilly and keep them spellbound with her stories, just as he has his readers with this book.

Joanna says

I'm not a huge fan of "thrillers" so I was impressed that I was so entertained by Too Close to Miss. Some of the character development was slightly lacking - I noticed I was getting confused keeping track of some of the outlying characters, but this is pretty typical for a thriller novel for me.

The story was really fast paced and I loved the backdrop of Boston. I was legitimately excited to pick up the book and read and I really enjoyed the strong female protagonist. I look forward to reading more from John Perich!

Christy says

This was better than some of the books I've read but not as good as others in the thriller genre. It was slow to get going for me and I found all of Mara's building and/or repeating injuries almost laughable by the end. Some of the characters were hard to keep up with as there was little to no background on them. I did like that I didn't know if the betrayals of "friends" was truly over (Saul) until the book ended. However, I feel like

Mara is a bit shallow or underdeveloped in that she only has a handful of friends and most of those weren't right for her. I don't know if it's the kindle version that caused some confusion where it seemed to jump from scene to scene but at least there were no glaring grammar errors such as word misuse and the like. In all, I enjoyed the book and thought the idea behind the land grab was a good plot.

Quillracer says

This book merits 3 stars for an interesting plot with some novel twists.

But I never quite got a good feel for Mara Cunningham, who was a journalist, photojournalist, or crime scene photographer, (depending on which chapter I was reading). Other than knowing she has red hair, I don't have an idea what she looks like. Is she tall or short, stocky or slim, with long flowing hair or a short bob? She never became 'real' to me, was just a character on the page.

Several threads in the plot didn't quite gel for me either. Things (like a gun and a flash drive) appear then disappear then appear again. And several of the scenes which turned out to be dreams started out reading as if they were actual events. One was so unclear as to what it was, I read it three times trying to figure out what was going on and still didn't know. It wasn't until I gave up and moved on to the next scene that I realized that one was a dream.

There's a character who pops up a couple times to feed Mara information or get her out of jams she's landed in, which smacks a little too much of convenience to me. A little help is okay, but readers like to see the main character accomplish things on her own. Mara had help a little too often for it to ring true, as if the author couldn't figure out how to do what needing doing, so he brought in a 'ringer' to pull it off. That gave those scenes a bit of a Deus ex machine feel.

The ending had that, too. All through the book, Mara had been suspected of being a killer of several people but suddenly in the last chapter, the cop who was after her turns around and nabs the real bad guy. That's as it should be, but the main character should put all the pieces together and convince the police the bad guy did it. That didn't happen here. Perich just sprang it on us.

All of that earns *Too Close To Miss* 1 star. And outweighs the 3 stars for the plot. Since we can only give whole stars, I gave this book 2, but one-and-a-half or maybe one-and-three-quarters would be closer to the truth.

Sorry, Mr. Perich, I won't be back for more of Mara's adventures.

Sylvia says

I was happy while reading this book, and when finished, I was happy that I'd read it. It's a satisfying thriller. My interest in thrillers and mysteries and detective stories is uneven because the formula (and there is a formula) often feels worn and done. I can see where it's going after five pages. This story, however, does formula in the right way. All the familiar steps of a mystery are there, but they're handled with finesse and that made the story feel really good to read. Kinda like dancing swing with a good partner. The rock step can

get old really fast, but a partner who knows what they're doing will happily surprise you.

I keep thinking of this book as a delightful snack because I kept reading chapters like I eat chips. But the dance metaphor works better. I knew all the steps, and the cues for the tricky steps, I but didn't know which ones the author was going to use. As the protagonist got deeper and deeper into the mystery, so did I. So much so that when it came time to do normal things, like brush my teeth, I got really annoyed.

Continuing the theme, this story is a bit of a dance around Boston and its surrounding neighborhoods. Not only was it exciting to find out what would happen next, I also wanted to know where the protagonist would go. There are a lot of "I've been to a place like that" moments. The protagonist is also wonderful. A smart yet flawed woman named Mara Cunningham. I can't say that I saw myself in her, but I did relate to her and came to care for her very much.

All in all, a very satisfying read.

Terri says

Too Close to Miss by John Perich is an exciting thriller that takes place in the heart of Boston. Mara Cunningham, photographer for the Tribune, knows that carrying on a relationship with a married man is a mistake and has put that behind. That is, until she gets a call in the middle of the night to tell her that man, a prominent attorney, has been shot. Mara will do anything to find out who shot him and why. But will she be too late?

This is a fascinating thriller that kept my interest for about 95% of the book. Near the end of the book the main character does a sort of explain-it-all to a person who already knows what she knows. I don't like that in movies, and I don't like that in books. However, the rest of the story is well written and makes me want to check out more works by this author.
