



After the Eclipse: A Mother's Murder, a Daughter's Search

Sarah Perry

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"Stunning." —*Entertainment Weekly* | "Raw and perfect." —Laura Miller, *Slate*

"Heartbreaking yet hopeful." —Samantha Irby, *Marie Claire*

A fierce memoir of a mother's murder, a daughter's coming-of-age in the wake of immense loss, and her mission to know the woman who gave her life.

When Sarah Perry was twelve, she saw a partial eclipse of the sun, an event she took as a sign of good fortune for her and her mother, Crystal. But that brief moment of darkness ultimately foreshadowed a much larger one: two days later, Crystal was murdered in their home in rural Maine, just a few feet from Sarah's bedroom.

The killer escaped unseen; it would take the police twelve years to find him, time in which Sarah grew into adulthood, struggling with abandonment, police interrogations, and the effort of rebuilding her life when so much had been lost. Through it all she would dream of the eventual trial, a conviction—all her questions finally answered. But after the trial, Sarah's questions only grew. She wanted to understand her mother's life, not just her final hours, and so she began a personal investigation, one that drew her back to Maine, taking her deep into the abiding darkness of a small American town.

Told in searing prose, *After the Eclipse* is a luminous memoir of uncomfortable truth and terrible beauty, an exquisite memorial for a mother stolen from her daughter, and a blazingly successful attempt to cast light on her life once more.

After the Eclipse: A Mother's Murder, a Daughter's Search Details

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From Reader Review After the Eclipse: A Mother's Murder, a Daughter's Search for online ebook

Jennifer says

This book....So heartbreaking, so well written - it's unbelievable that this is a memoir. I hope Sarah keeps writing.

Carol says

This book is for those who like memoirs, who want all the feels of a real person's experience, who especially enjoy the personal stories of those who overcome tragedies that would fell lesser men, who believe that often victims don't get their due in terms of the complexity of their lives, their hopes, their dreams, their choices. None of the foregoing describes me.

I read this for an IRL True Crime book club. My interest in true crime is driven by an appreciation for forensic science, for the connection of clues and evidence by investigators into a coherent whole that allows them to catch killers whose relationships to the victims aren't obvious and whose motivations are a puzzlement, at least initially. If your interest in true crime is similar to mine, this is not the book for you either. There is almost no substantive content in *After the Eclipse* relating to the investigation or how the police or DA developed their case. This is the personal story of the daughter of a crime victim, Sarah Perry and her mother, Crystal, particularly, how Perry experienced the murder of her mother in the home they shared, when Sarah was 12, and the toll the subsequent investigation took on her life. It is quite sad, in parts, as you might imagine, although she ends up as the owner of an MFA, author of this book, and appears to have gotten it all together far better than many of us who have less baggage. ATE is also quite comprehensive in terms of the details of Perry's life and, further, the details of her mother's life. For the right reader, it wouldn't be excruciatingly long, but engaging. It is a tale of Perry's survival. It is also in large part her mother's tale. That tale needs to be of interest to you because much real estate is devoted to Crystal, the victim -- her childhood, her mother, her siblings, every boyfriend and SO that she chose, how often they fought, what they fought about, Crystal's preference in eyemakeup, her cleaning habits, the details of her job at the shoe factory, who attended the funeral and who didn't, who her best friend was and wasn't. Are you still with me? If you are, you might just be a memoir fan and this book could be a perfect choice for you.

When Crystal's murderer is identified, someone about whom the reader has heard no mention until that moment, there is no real reveal. Sure, his name is provided, but that's it. The sole major character in the real-life events (there are 2 others, far more minor) whom Perry never interviewed is ... you guessed it -- the murderer. Hence, *After the Eclipse* offers no payoff for a typical true-crime reader - understanding the crime, the criminal/s, how the criminals screwed up and were caught, what evidence was presented to the jury that clinched the verdict, etc.

I don't rate books on how they make me feel. If I did, this book would garner 1-star. I stayed up until 3 a.m. to finish it because I found it to be incredibly depressing. It wasn't the book for me. While I'm not typically one who buys into the "there's a reader for every book" mantra, in this case, there are many readers for this book - they read memoirs and want to know about victim impact and, perhaps how blue-collar female crime victims, in particular, are treated by the justice system and, more importantly, by their own families and communities. *After the Eclipse* is a well-written book intended for those readers. Not this reader.

Ericka Seidemann says

Wow. This is a powerful book.

In 1994, Sarah Perry's mother, Crystal, was murdered in their home while Sarah was only a room away. It was a brutality I can't even fathom. 12-year-old Sarah was thrust into a world of fear, abandonment, and unspeakable grief.

More than a recounting of events, Sarah gives the reader the complete atmosphere of growing up in rural Maine, and the people of the small town of Bridgton that made up her world. She delves into the person her mother was, and what made her who she was. This memoir is an attempt to know her mother, from the perspective of a grown woman cognizant of her mother's life choices, her anguish over on-again, off-again relationships, and her love for her daughter. This story is also Sarah's journey to discover herself, as she was as a 12-year-old girl enduring unbelievable tragedy, and now as an adult understanding the whole picture of Crystal Perry as a person.

So many adults in Sarah's life tried to help her cope with this horrible "thing that happened," but many were misguided in their kindness, or too blind with grief to offer anything of value. The fear that still resides in Sarah is palpable. It's easy, as a reader, to think "this is an event that happened, once, a long time ago," but for Sarah, it's every day of her life, and she brings that idea to the forefront. Her memoir is courageous, it's honest, and never indulges in self-pity.

I appreciated Sarah's candor. She acknowledges her faults, the mistakes all of us make as adolescents. She allows herself room to ask questions, to wonder about her mother's motivations, the relationships she maintained with men and with her friends. She wonders about the fallacy of memory and about the unreliability of what you think you know about those close to you. The research is impeccable. Sarah refers to police transcripts, interviews, and personal remembrances, but this never reads like a sterile report; it's like sitting with your best friend and listening to her tell you her story.

I dropped everything else I was reading when I started reading *After the Eclipse*. It was compelling and at the same time humbling. Sarah's foray into her past took unbelievable courage, and this memoir is a testament to her strength. The kind of strength, I'm sure, she got from her mother.

Many thanks to Sarah Perry for the advance copy.
This review is also posted on my blog at flyleafunfurled.com.

Elizabeth says

Gosh I really hate writing reviews for memoirs. I always feel like I'm passing judgment on the author themselves rather than the actual book.

Anyway, this is an interesting memoir. It's part true crime, part the story of an ordinary loved woman, and part a frustrating description of unloving dysfunctional family members (that reminded me a bit of Hillbilly

Elegy). I loved that she wrote the story of her mother's life, not just her murder. I think she was pretty honest and fair about herself and her mother's struggles, and it was pretty heartbreaking to see the author describe what it was like to move forward with her life after her mother was brutally murdered in the next room.

So here's the negative part...my rating of a book is always heavily connected to my experience with the book. Initially I rated it 4 stars. And then I went to bed and didn't sleep all night because I couldn't stop thinking about it. It's not an overly graphic book in terms of the murder (although there are some really difficult parts to read) but I could not stop thinking about being murdered while my kids were listening. It actually gave me mild nightmares when I actually did fall asleep. I still would highly recommend it but maybe not to sensitive readers and maybe not to read at night.

Lauren says

This was one of the best memoirs I've ever read, and I've read a lot of them.

Sarah Perry was twelve when her single mother was murdered by an unknown monster in the room next to hers. She heard it all; she was powerless to stop it. *After The Eclipse* is her powerful story. It takes us through the years with her mom, the agonizing experience of her loss, and everything that follows. This was meticulously researched and the writing was out of this world. Just read it.

Preston Witt says

(I have a review copy.) I figured *After the Eclipse* was going to be heartbreaking, but I couldn't possibly have known it was going to be this good, this devastating, and this important. The whole world feels a little different. I'm stunned. It's (alarmingly) rare for someone to have something new to say. It's even rarer for a writer to be at the right time and place for that story to have a real impact. But this tender and insightful memoir has the chance to actually change the way we think about violence and class and the American soul. Weaker writers lash out occasionally when they can--to make a point, when they lose control of their material, when they want an easy way to appear strong and clever. This book never does that, not even once. Bitterness, hate, fear--despite the worst of human beings, somehow it doesn't prevail, not here. It's no small miracle that every page of this tragedy is awash in tenderness, that Perry maintains complete command over a series of impossibly slippery, chaotic, and horrifying events. But Perry. Is. A. Master.

After the Eclipse has made me simultaneously so sad for the world and yet so hopeful that the right books by the right people can actually make a difference in reshaping us into softer, more human forms. Evidence for this is that I am profoundly uninterested in ever reading another piece of crime fiction or true crime. Read this book and you will cry, you will never look at America the same way again, you will be angry, but in a deep, knowable way you will be better. My heart is bigger now. Big enough to say f*ck Truman Capote: down with exploitative true crime, and up with Sarah Perry.

Jeanette says

This memoir is a love letter to her Mother who was murdered. At times it is adjective, adverb, analogy overblown but it comes out of heartfelt agony for the dependence of their lives upon each other, within the horror of her Mother's end. Abrupt, audibly witnessed and brutal murder ripped her from Sarah's life at 12.

Her Mother was then 30.

There are passages I could quote, so psychologically apt for "grief" periods. How family, kin, social welfare people, doctors- all of them. To what levels that they determine which or what "grief" is or should be or seems to be "grief" that is normal. That period of the first 2 years, as written here just after the murder, is one of the best lessons (voice) I've ever read for an answer to that "knowing norm" know better inquiries of the professionals and guardians. Both. What that is truly worth. Little to nothing. Because to the one within the beloved's void, all is different. Trust and safety are no longer viable states or quantity defined entities that exist. Not in any personal sense. Nor even in any human one.

It's a long book. There was a spot just after page 200, when I was too "over-Sarahed" to want to continue. But I plugged on. She's a literary expert in finding the word and the comparable everyday nuance to relate human warmth distance, pretend closeness, duplicity etc. She's brave-but most often too the words are the wall to hid within. MUCH of the time, calmness outside. For the first two or three years after the murder she is physically moved often between relatives, and the authorities made the first few months especially horrific. 64 "I don't know" replies per session. As an audible witness, this treatment for a 12 or 13 year old? She's bright and at times she hears and knows how suspected she herself is on top of it. Difficult to ominous for her own self-identity. So Sarah is a self-made non-whining hero. Rare, presently and in this case of further rejections, she is a credit to her Mother's love returned.

The case is eventually closed. When Sarah is long an adult.

The picture/photo on the cover is the only one- none inside. I wished there were a few more. But the hair, the thinness, the feisty spirit! Maybe the cover is enough. Crystal was Crystal. Quite definable and no slouch nor slacker in most anything you could name. She ate life. And it ate her.

This is a strong single Mom and daughter bonding tale first and foremost. It occurs and has acts quite apart from a cozy suburban or small town ideal or most modern dysfunction saga. It's not a book for everyone and requires great patience in delving into a plethora of strong and often selfish women. As such it has many beautiful passages it also holds much repetition and reaction explaining. All the Aunties and Grandma. Plus it's all the men in her Mother's life too through Sarah's eyes.

She loved her Mother. And she misses her every day. The criminals and perps never suffer what they wroth. Most think they do with prison and punishments, but they do not. Not even those who earn execution.

lucky little cat says

Exemplary true crime memoir. Perry never loses sight of who she was as a child, and her account of her mother's murder

unexpectedly allows us to root for that child-self throughout the book. Perry's mother, Crystal, killed violently at age 30, had been doing everything right: she'd divorced her unstable husband, bought her own small home, was holding down a steady job, and was raising a well-adjusted daughter, age twelve. Sarah Perry tells her mother's story eloquently, speaking for countless women who have been victims of violence when they were more than entitled to safety and security.

Beverly says

Told with spare prose and gut-wrenching honesty, even when this puts her and her family in a bad light, this memoir is hard to read, but well worth the effort. I can't even imagine how I would have felt if I was a witness to my mother's murder at age 12. I admire her strength and her resolve.

JanB says

This is such a well-written and powerful read. Sarah Perry was only 12 years old when her mother was murdered as she lay sleeping in the next room. The murder was particularly brutal and vicious and Sarah heard it as it was happening. It would take 12 years to find the murderer.

Sarah's story is one of "before" and "after" the murder. It is part memoir, part true crime/courtroom drama. But mostly it's the story of the close relationship she and her mother enjoyed, and the devastating years after the murder. Sarah was shunted off to live with various relatives and suffered the emotional effects of losing her mother in such a violent way.

The strength of the book is the humanity she brings to her mother. Her mother is not simply a statistic, she was a living, breathing, human being who had hopes and dreams and plans for the future. Sarah brings her to life on the page so I felt as if I knew Crystal, and what the immensity of the loss means to her daughter. Sarah tells us about the Crystal she knew as a young girl, and the more complete picture she has of her now. She is brutally honest as she tells us the flattering and the not-so-flattering stories of her mother.

This is a picture of grief, in all its rawness and pain, even now, many years later. The emotional and psychological toll on Sarah is heartbreaking. It's the story of a small town, the attitudes and prejudices and the characters who inhabit it. Sarah's story should have us all thinking about how we view violence against women, and about the men who inflict such violence against women.

I admire Sarah's honesty and courage in telling her story and I can't help but think how so very proud her mother would be of her.

* many thanks to the author, Netgalley and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review

Claire Fuller says

Wow, this book. It's heartbreaking without being sentimental, horrific without being gratuitous, sparsely written while still being completely absorbing. It's about the murder of Crystal Perry in 1994, while her daughter, Sarah Perry is hiding in her bedroom, aged 12. Perry draws a vivid portrait of her mother and her life, as well as the difficulties Perry herself faced after the murder, when being passed from one family member to another. This is definitely going to be one of my top books of the year. Highly recommended.

Stacey A. Prose and Palate says

"Because of her, I used to try and save the tiny moles our cat chased in the yard. Because of her, I sing along to the radio, in my terrible voice, and I drive with the windows down, the air whipping across my arms. Because of her, I will always believe love is possible. Her name was Crystal. She cast light."

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This book is a raw, beautiful memorial to the woman that Crystal Perry was and an incredible feat of resiliency, courage and strength on the part of her daughter, Sarah, as she sought answers for the horrific crime that changed her life forever when she was just 12 years old. Sarah's story absolutely gutted me and this is without question, one of the saddest books I have read all year. She writes an extremely powerful examination of the cycle of domestic abuse, addiction and poverty while also giving a moving tribute to a woman who worked hard and loved hard, and who strived to make a better life for herself and her daughter. Sarah Perry, what an incredible gift you have for the written word and what an honor it was to meet your mother among the pages of this stunning book.

???????? heart wrenching stars.

Antigone says

Twelve-year-old Sarah Perry woke in the middle of the night to the sound of screaming. She sat, frozen in terror, for an indeterminate period of time. She ventured out of her bedroom to the darkened scene of this crime after the assailant had fled. Her mother was a shadow slumped ominously on the floor. The telephones were not working. Sarah slipped into the stillness of her rural Maine neighborhood to dart from house to house, looking for help. No door opened to her. She would eventually reach a restaurant; would eventually notify the police. What she did not know, and would not know for many years yet, was that the ambulance she'd sought so desperately to call had driven away without her mother in it. The authorities opted, instead, for the coroner's van.

I want to tell you about my mother.

Let me try again.

I am tired of this impulse to wound myself so that I can prove that I'll heal.

Such is the fundamental struggle of trauma.

It often seems that victims of trauma are obsessed with their experience. How else to explain the way they seem to think about it all the time; talk about it, suffer it; eat, sleep and breathe their damage every moment of every day? On the surface it looks like an obvious, and obviously unhealthy, fixation. Yet what so many mistake for an obsession with catastrophe is, in fact, the intrinsic human drive to construct a narrative.

We, each of us, have a story, and much of our identity is wrapped up in the memory of it. A traumatized person is missing elements of her story. The injury was so profound that the psyche was forced to repress

certain aspects of it; to throw certain sections into cold storage - waiting, it is hoped, for a day safe enough to draw those dangerous elements forth and insert them into the script. A victim of trauma is not obsessing about the event as much as she's driving herself to find a way to remember it completely. Achieving that degree of recollection will allow her to own the experience and, through owning it, gain the ability to consign it to the past. The road is a healthy one...if you can manage to see it.

Decades passed before Sarah Perry felt safe enough to attempt a more comprehensive confrontation of her ordeal. She was a budding writer at twelve, right up until that awful night, but access to her art was lost in the shattering. Imagination, one can easily surmise, had become a frightening gift. Still, she worked hard to regain her creative footing. And she would choose to use it in the here-and-now, as she travelled back to Maine, as she travelled back in time, to uncover her own story.

This is an exceptional piece of work. The navigation is meticulous; the balances achieved between before and after, the legal violation and the psychological one, the shifting sands of an orphan's travail and the blind faith required to skim over them, like a shark, forever moving forward...all of it is masterfully done. She never forgets she has a reader, never loses sight of the knowledge we need to join in the journey. That's hard to manage in memoirs like this, and rare enough that I tend to grant great latitude for the hitch and the twitch and the swift retreat. No latitude required here. Sarah Perry will hold you, from start to finish, and in an astonishingly transparent way.

A tremendous feat.

Maxwell says

One of the best memoirs I've ever read. The writing was incredible and Perry's ability to both separate herself from the events that took place but also put you right at the heart of it with her is impressive and heart-wrenching. Definitely a book that I will be thinking about for quite some time. Highly recommend this but know that it's quite brutal at times due to the subject matter.

Valerity (Val) says

This is a beautifully written book about loss and coming of age by Sarah Perry. It's relatable with the recent eclipse we had too in a way, as the tragedy in her life happened just 2 days after she experienced an eclipse. Almost like it was a bad omen, her mother Crystal was killed in a horrific murder in their home, just one room away from her daughter who was awakened and heard it happening and bravely managed to escape. Sarah shares what the years were like growing up without either parent, being bounced between her mom's family members and even some well-meaning friends briefly, as she struggled to keep a grip on her fear, sanity, and loneliness while she finished growing up. A very good read for most true crime lovers. An ARC was provided by NetGalley and the publisher for an unbiased review.
