



## The Perfect Mother

*Nina Darnton*

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## **The Perfect Mother** Nina Darnton

When an American exchange student is accused of murder, her mother will stop at nothing to save her.

A midnight phone call shatters Jennifer Lewis's carefully orchestrated life. Her daughter, Emma, who's studying abroad in Spain, has been arrested after the brutal murder of another student. Jennifer rushes to her side, certain the arrest is a terrible mistake and determined to do whatever is necessary to bring Emma home. But as she begins to investigate the crime, she starts to wonder whether she ever really knew her daughter. The police charge Emma, and the press leaps on the story, exaggerating every sordid detail. One by one, Emma's defense team, her father, and finally even Jennifer begin to have doubts.

A novel of harrowing emotional suspense, *The Perfect Mother* probes the dark side of parenthood and the complicated bond between mothers and daughters.

## **The Perfect Mother Details**

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Author : Nina Darnton

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## From Reader Review The Perfect Mother for online ebook

### Charlotte Lynn says

The Perfect Mother started with a midnight phone call. That was the only part that I was expecting. I thought this would be a book about the judicial system of Spain and how an American is unfairly treated. I was wrong. This is not a book about Emma, it is more the story of Jennifer, the mother. It is a story on how she had always taken care of her family, sometimes to the extreme, and how it has made Emma the student and person she has become. There were points in the book that I stopped and questioned my own mothering skills and how I would have handled the same situation. I found this happening often and realizing that “fixing it” does not always have the long term effects that a mother hopes for.

Throughout the story I really felt for Jennifer. There were times it felt like everyone was against her. Emma certainly was not helping herself, her husband was in the US, the court system was working against her, and even her PI and lawyer sometimes seemed to be against her. Jennifer did wake up and realize that sometimes you have to take off your rose colored glasses and look harder at yourself and how you are living your life to see the truth. I feel like she is coming out of this horrible adventure a better person and definitely a better mom. She still needs help and support but I believe she will find it now that her eyes are open.

I did not feel sorry for Emma. She did nothing to help herself and did not appreciate those that were trying to free her. Although, being in a foreign prison was punishment, I am not convinced that Emma has become a better person or even understands the whole picture. I feel like she needs a lot of help and the only way she will get it is for someone to force her. She does not see that there is anything wrong with herself and the way she is living her life.

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The Perfect Mother is definitely a book that shows the tougher and darker side of motherhood and the bonds between mothers and daughters. I recommend this book.

### Selena says

2.5 stars

I thought this book was okay. I really did not like Jennifer or Emma. I thought they were both spoiled, whiny and entitled. At some points, I found myself rooting against them because I found them so unlikeable. Jennifer views her daughter Emma as having no faults at all and explains away everything that Emma does wrong, even her part in the murder of a young Spanish man. My dislike only increased as she pines away for the PI helping her work on her daughter's case. She just came across as so selfish. She didn't care that her other kids at home needed her. She said that she was staying in Spain to help her daughter, but it was clear that she just wanted to be near Roberto.

Emma does nothing but whine and complain, even as her parents are paying for high priced lawyers and private detectives to help her. Without them, she would've rotted away in a Spanish prison and she is not the least bit grateful.

(view spoiler)

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### **Heather Fineisen says**

Do we ever know our children or ourselves? This seems to be the question Nina Darnton is asking in *The Perfect Mother* and it is universal. This book has been called a knock off or fictional take on the Amanda Knox Case. Not really. That's like saying I'm a knockoff of Kate Upton because we wear the same bra size, but our boobs just aren't in the same place.

Yes there is a murder involving an American student but in Spain and the victim is male. This story focuses on the mother's story and how she staggers and evolves throughout the ordeal. Was she living through her children and was she to blame for anything that happens to them? What is a parents true responsibility to each child? *A Perfect Mother* is a thoughtful and relatable narrative with believable characters. And Darnton makes you consider your own response to parenting in a like situation. Definitely will appeal to parents and mystery lovers who like a little ambiguity.

Provided by publisher

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### **Amy says**

During the Amanda Knox trial, the U.S. press regaled us with the Italians labeling Knox as 'Foxy Knoxy,' an American girl gone wild while studying in Italy. Her family was presented as a bunch of sad sacks, mortgaging their lives for their ne'er-do-well daughter. Was Knox guilty? Innocent? As much a victim as the deceased girl? We know what the Italian court said the first time, but they've now determined that Knox needs to stand trial again.

Did she do it?

As I read *The Perfect Mother*, I couldn't help but think about the Amanda Knox trial. Nina Darnton's book is based on the trial: an attractive, entitled American girl heads to Spain for a year abroad, meets a local guy who might be a drug dealer, a young man is murdered, and the girl is arrested as an accomplice.

In Darnton's book, the story is told primarily from the mother's point-of-view. Jennifer is a former model and actress, a woman accustomed to presenting a beautiful façade. When her children were born, she stayed home with them, determined to be the best mom in the world. Jennifer admits that she enjoys being the mom all the other kids love to be around, even as her oldest daughter Emma seems to be somewhat less impressed.

When Jennifer is awoken with a call from Emma, saying she's been arrested for murder, Jennifer's first thought is to get to her daughter as soon as possible. Her second - for husband Mark, a corporate lawyer, to get the best attorney possible in Seville. Her third? We can't tell anyone that our daughter has been accused of murder.

That last thought kicks off a pattern that Jennifer will find herself following. Always appearances.

This isn't to say that she doesn't love her daughter. She plainly, clearly does. Yet Jennifer is also, as Mark points out, blind to the truth. She lets herself believe what she wants to believe, nearly convincing herself

that it's true, something Mark accuses her of having done repeatedly throughout their marriage.

Jennifer is convinced that Emma is innocent. She's convinced that Emma's version of the events of the night of the murder are correct. She does not waver. She does not question. She is resolute.

A perfect mother would react like that, wouldn't she?

Jose, Emma's lawyer, is not so quick to believe in Emma's innocence; nor is Roberto, a private investigator they hire. Roberto, in fact, is highly skeptical. He asks questions and makes occasional statements that broadcast his disbelief in Emma's story, but all Jennifer cares about is the job Roberto can do. She takes exception to some of what he says, but he's the means to an end.

Mark and Jennifer's marriage takes a hit, of course. She stays in Spain while he heads home to work on a big money court case. Jennifer at first judges him harshly, but then she comes to embrace her time in control in Spain. She loves Mark, but finds him burdensome.

And then there is Roberto. The emotional sustenance that Jennifer should be drawing from Mark instead comes from Roberto. They swap emotional intimacies, and Jennifer feels herself drawn deep and deeper to him.

For a woman for whom appearances are so important, this trial upends her world. Her daughter is innocent, but that same daughter - the one for whom Jennifer is sacrificing time with her other two children, her husband, and her parents - treats her horribly, with condescension and disdain. Yes, Emma needs her parents on her side, but that doesn't stop her from trying to alienate them as best as possible.

It is quickly apparent that Emma is manipulative and deceitful. As Mark and Jennifer recall events from Emma's life, you can see that deceit and manipulation were planted early. Jennifer, in her quest to be the perfect mother, allowed Emma to get away with some childhood mischief, some more serious than others. Is that why Emma's in jail? Was Jennifer too permissive? Did she not hold Emma accountable for her mistakes?

Darnton asks some interesting questions. Just how responsible are parents for their children's behavior? She also questions the tabloid press, both the United States' and Spain's. Why do they print salacious libel? Why must they cast judgment?

Frantic with worry about Emma, Jennifer does everything she can to help prove Emma's innocence. Mark, a far less enthusiastic believer of his daughter's lack of culpability, flies in periodically. It doesn't take long for a wedge to come between them. Past hurts and present insecurity drive them to hurl hateful invectives to each other, particularly harmful when Mark and Jennifer need each other most.

Jennifer's search for perfection is a subtext of the novel. As she packs to go to Spain, she wonders what sort of clothing to wear to court. What does the mother of the defendant wear? She dresses with care, even when meeting Roberto for drinks.

And then there is the ending, which may not satisfy some of you. What would the perfect mother do? How would she respond? You know the answers to those questions, and so does Jennifer. But will she heed them?

I did not want to put this book down. It is fantastically written and keeps you turning the pages. Jennifer is not always sympathetic, Mark and Emma even less so. But how would you act if your child was accused of a

murder you know - you just know - he or she didn't commit? You know this because you know your child.

Or perhaps, as Jennifer slowly discovers, you know the part of your child that she lets you know. There are other parts that are concealed from you, for reasons that confound you.

Did Emma do what she's accused of doing? Did Amanda Knox?

Sometimes there is more to the story than what you see on the surface. That's a lesson Jennifer, with all of the importance she places on appearances, has to learn. Whether she likes what she discovers - whether she can live with it - is something she needs to ascertain.

Read this book. And then come back and tell me what you think happens at the end.

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### **Matt says**

Darnton provides an entertaining second novel, even if its foundation is pulled from the headlines in a case most tabloid-hungry folks know all too well. When Jennifer Lewis receives a frantic phone call from her daughter, things take a dramatic turn. Emma has been detained in Seville, Spain and is being questioned about a murder within her flat. Jennifer drops everything and heads to Europe, keen to clear things up and bring Emma back to the States. When Jennifer arrives, she discovers that things are more complex than first presumed. Jennifer secures legal counsel for Emma and waits to see the Spanish wheels of justice move. When an investigator is brought onto the case, Jennifer forges a bond with Roberto and tries to work with him to clear Emma, while digging up dirty on a supposed boyfriend, the mastermind of the murder. Jennifer's family suffers back at home and her husband, Mark, must straddle both sides of the Atlantic to pay for the legal fees, while Jennifer remains in Spain, searching for answers. Lines are blurred with Roberto, and the tabloids take advantage of these weaknesses to exacerbate Emma's problems. With Emma's life hanging in the balance, Jennifer must play the role of the perfect mother to ensure her eldest is protected, but at what cost to everyone else?

Darnton is surely a competent writer, though this novel leaves me a little less than impressed. The story is not only 'ripped from the headlines' but also uses the Amanda Knox story and almost replaces names and locales. It has little, if any, unique attribute and is superficial in its departure from the Knox version. Creating a less than stellar romantic connection between 'perfect mother' Jennifer and trial investigator Roberto seemed a little more trivial, especially since the story's depth did not extend into the full legal battle of the event. I would have preferred more nuance or a deeper tale to flesh out more development and less sickly-sweet weak mother trying to put her daughter first.

Kudos for the idea, Mrs. Darnton. While you have the ability to convey a story well, perhaps it's time you focus less on the structure of a well-known case and create one yourself.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:

<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

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### **Cynthia (Bingeing On Books) says**

This is an interesting story about murder and motherhood. The story is told from Jennifer's point of view and the book delves deeply into how the murder accusations effect the accused's family. I was interested in the storyline and figuring out whether Emma was innocent or guilty. But there was something about the book that put me off a little. I am sure everyone has heard the motto for writers: show, don't tell. Well this author did not show very much. For instance, when the author was describing some of the landmarks or customs in Spain, she sounded like more of a tour guide. When I read books set in other locations, especially when those locations are other countries, I enjoy authors who can transplant me to that place with their words. This book did not do that.

Now of course this book was about more than just the location, but that is just an example of where the author fell flat in her descriptions of things. I really disliked the character of Jennifer. It was hard to connect with her because the author also did not describe Jennifer's feelings very well. There would be long conversations with dialogue only, no descriptions of facial expressions, emotions or anything. So the only way I knew Jennifer was feeling was when she actually told someone about it. And Jennifer seemed way more blind to her daughters' faults than most mothers. Every single time something happened (and there are flashbacks of other events that happened throughout Emma's childhood), Jennifer would make excuses and say there was a mistake, despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary. That got really old. Jennifer's decision at the end of the book shocked me and furthered my dislike of her. I don't want to say too much about that because I don't want to give away the ending to those who may choose to read the book.

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### **Cleo Bannister says**

The premise to this book had me hooked, Jennifer is the mother to three children the eldest of which is Emma who at twenty is studying in Spain. One night Jennifer takes a phone call that changes her life, Emma is at the Police station, suspect in the murder of a local boy. I love books that let me play the 'What would I do game' and this is definitely one of those reads.

This book is as much about Jennifer and her relationships than the murder of Rodrigo Perez which almost becomes the backdrop to the drama being played out in Jennifer's life as she is faced with the reality that her daughter which is different to that of the pretty, intelligent honour roll girl who goes to Princeton, this is a girl who has been lying to her parents about where she lives and how she spends her days for months.

This book has obviously been based on the killing of Meredith Kercher, an English student studying in Italy whose roommate, American Amanda Knox was suspected of being involved in her murder. That case hit the international news and to this day hasn't properly been resolved. However, although the headlines to that case have been used by Nina Darnton this book does not seek to directly copy that murder but rather used it a starting point. What is similar is the reporting by the media in the country of the murder using the fact that Emma was an American and allegedly brash and promiscuous in their news while back in America Jennifer enlists the help of a friend to brief a PR company to emphasise that Emma was the perfect daughter and her supposed involvement is all a horrible mistake. The other similarity is the way both Italy and Spain come up with a narrative that includes motive to build their prosecution case and it is up to the defence to disprove this. All of this makes for a fascinating read.

There are some good supporting characters to this story including Emma's father Mark who is a US Attorney along with the local defence lawyer Jose and his support assistance Roberto. Jose and Roberto are Jennifer's main support in the early days of the investigation while Mark remains in the US appearing in court and assisting Jennifer's parents in looking after Emma's younger siblings. Any parent will recognise albeit in an extreme form the prioritisation of everyday life and multiple children who need you.

I really enjoyed this book on many different levels and although both of the key protagonists are not people that I'd want to spend time with their reactions to the events as they unfold were suitable for the story being told.

I'd like to say a big thank you to the publishers Penguin Group Plume for allowing me to read and ponder over this book ahead of publication on 25 November 2014.

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### **Susan says**

Jennifer Lewis is sleeping one night in her Connecticut home, when she receives a telephone call. It is from her eldest child, twenty year old Emma, who has been living, and studying, in Spain for the last eight months. Emma blurts out a tale of a man being killed in her apartment and asks her parents to come and help her. However, husband Mark – a lawyer himself – suggests that Jennifer go to Spain first and that he will join her there. Before long, Jennifer has left behind her other children, sixteen year old Lily and eight year old Eric, and gone to support her daughter.

Of course, as we can tell from the title, Jennifer is the 'perfect mother' of the title. Her husband even jokes that, were he to come back in a future life, he would like to do so as one of her children. She gives up a career as an actress to be home; to nurture, love and support her three children. Her house is a refuge, she is the mother that her children's friends confide in and she organises parties, play dates and school projects with ease. However, when she meets up with Emma at the police station, she finds a child she hardly recognises. Emma is withdrawn, sullen and, pretty soon, it is obvious that she has been lying to her mother about her life in Spain. Despite claims that Emma's version of events do not fully make sense, she is unwilling to discuss what happened that night – simply insisting that her version of events should be believed and becoming moody and difficult when challenged. It is also apparent that Jennifer is not the completely perfect and capable woman she would have everyone believe, with hints of a drinking problem and a husband who is so removed from events that you hardly feel he is involved at all.

Obviously, this novel bears more than a passing resemblance to the Meredith Kercher case, a young woman of only twenty one, who was found dead in her Italian apartment in 2007. Her flatmate, Amanda Knox, was the prime suspect in a case which has still not concluded in justice for the Kercher family and, as such, I do not wish to comment on that too much. I felt a little uncomfortable in places, reading this, but the novel does raise very interesting discussion points. How much would a mother do for her daughter, even as it becomes apparent that her version of events are not necessarily believable.

This is, ultimately, fiction – even if it is based loosely on real events – and, as a novel is both compelling and interesting. Of course, we see events through the point of view of Jennifer and, despite her faults, you do feel for her, stranded in Spain alone and dealing with the situation largely without the support of her husband. With nobody to turn to, she does become reliant on the Private Investigator employed to help support her daughter's version of events. This is by far a more interesting relationship than that with her daughter, who it

is impossible to feel any sympathy for. The novel is well plotted and there is a good twist to the storyline at the end. I think this would be an ideal book for a reading group, with lots to discuss. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

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### **sue says**

Jennifer's daughter Emma is in terrible trouble, she is living in Spain and is subject to Spain's laws.

Jennifer's husband is a Lawyer but not adverse in Spanish law. He wants to be with Emma and Jennifer in Spain to support them but he cannot due to his pull of work to his clients. He has cases himself to see to, plus, he needs to keep making money now that its needed for his wife to remain in Spain to support their daughter.

Jennifer has always prided herself on being a good Mother, a Perfect Mother. She gave up her career to stay at home with the children. At the moment she knows that relatives are looking after her other two children at home and her husband when he is around.

The thing is, Jennifer has always taken charge of situations when its come to the children and she is no different now. Things unfold not only regards the alleged crime that their daughter has been suspected in but also the flaws in her relationship with her daughter, and her husband. Maybe she is not the Perfect Mother she thought she was?

All kinds of things come to light about Emma.

This is quite a page turner for me, and the ending was sharp, very sharp in that I didn't expect what happened.

The detectives, the law enforcement officers and all characters that Jennifer came in contact with became very real to me.

As for the style of writing this author has, I loved it. The story flowed so well, and like I say, it kept my interest from beginning right until the last word written.

Highly recommended.

I would like to thank PENGUIN GROUP Plume via Net Galley for allowing me a copy to read and review.

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## Michele says

Clearly based on the Amanda Knox case, The Perfect Mother is one mother's story of events that occur when her oldest daughter, a Princeton University student attending a study-abroad program in Seville, Spain, is suddenly accused of murder and the emotional, legal, and family chaos that then ensues.

Even all these years later, our fascination with the Amanda Knox case remains unabated. Did she or didn't she? This was obviously the impetus for Darnton's novel. Although told in third person POV, the story revolves around the accused's mother, Jennifer, a woman who prides herself on being "The Perfect Mother." A former bit actress who gave up any thought of a career after marrying a lawyer and having children, Jennifer has thrown herself into raising perfect, successful children. And she was under the impression she has succeeded, despite some bumps along the way. After all, Emma, our Princeton/Spanish/Jailbird was everything a mother could hope for: she was pretty, popular, honor roll, and worked tirelessly on the Freedom Project to release prisoners unjustly convicted. This is a young woman with morals and values.

When Jennifer receives the middle of the night phone call from Emma that she has been arrested in Spain, she immediately travels to Spain to sort this "misunderstanding" out. Of course, as you may have already guessed, it isn't nearly that simple. And as Jennifer is about to find out, she may not know her daughter nearly as well as she thought.

That, then, is your premise. Pretty compelling, don't you think?

Now I need to talk about the execution of that premise. This is going to be one of those novels where a lot of folks are going to be just great with it, while others are going to be very disappointed, thinking it was far too simplistic. Unfortunately, I'll just tell you straight up that I fall into that latter camp.

While the book was a very fast read (I whipped through it in one day), it read like a B-movie to me. The characters never read true to me. Some more so than others (Emma's dad was possibly the worst, I spent the first couple of chapters wondering if he was her step-father because his reaction to her arrest was so blasé that I kept thinking there was no way \*this\* was her father). I kept waiting for everything to be taken up a notch, so to speak; for the real action to begin, but it never did. The character's actions were slightly unbelievable (see below for actual examples if you care to read that far). I want to emphasize that this wasn't a \*bad\* book, just a largely forgettable one that could have been so very much better if it had been taken to the next level, so I felt more than a little frustrated. There is a love story of sorts in here, which I never felt but it was obvious I was supposed to, as well as a big twist at the end which wasn't really a twist but I won't spoil it in any case. So on to specifics.....

From the very first page I thought that the characters were cardboard cutouts. The father. I mentioned him. When the phone call comes in the middle of the night from his daughter saying she has been arrested for murder and please come help her his reaction is blah. When his wife repeats the phone conversation to him his response, rather than shock or dismay or any other 'normal' father reaction is (to his wife), "Shh, honey. Hold on. She'll be okay. We'll take care of this. Please, Jen, you have to be calm if you're going to help her." As his wife is packing in the middle of the night, there is then a paragraph drift to tell the reader about Jen's "striking blue eyes and thick, lustrous brown hair" and how she "spent three mornings a week at the gym to maintain her toned, elegant body, still firm and youthful although she had celebrated her forty-sixth birthday a month earlier." Not sure we needed that or that it's helpful. Sigh.

Okay, let's fast-forward to Spain. The author does a very good job with Emma, the student in jail. She is a giant pain in the ass. And she does a good job portraying her mother's denial of everything that is wrong with her daughter. So kudos for that. My problem was with the other main character introduced during this time, Roberto, a private detective hired by Jen to obtain evidence needed to get Emma out of jail. Oh, he's a nice enough character. But for the 5000 Euros his retainer cost, he is the most incompetent detective I've ever seen on paper. He doesn't *\*do anything\** that even I, a stupid layperson, didn't think of doing myself about 50 pages earlier. This becomes frustrating because were I the mother, I would have fired his ass, I don't care how much "Johnny Depp beautiful" he looked like. (Author's description, not mine, lol.) And yes, again, he was a bit cardboard. He had a bit of a backstory to flesh him out, but at no point did I feel him spring to life, nor did I feel his connection with Jen to be authentic.

So besides falling in love with our incompetent detective, Jen spends all her time in Spain making phone calls. I'm not kidding. Page after page after page of her making calls to one person or another. Now I realize that she would probably actually be making a lot of phone calls. But this was going on *\*so\** much that even I noticed it after the 100th phone call being described and I don't normally get bothered by stuff like that in books. Really, I don't. But when something is very repetitive, it comes to my attention and then every time I see it after that, it's like fingernails on a chalkboard. So I'm just telling you right now, the woman must have a phone bill in the thousands of Euros.

I realize by the length of this review that it must seem like I hated this book which isn't true. I'm sorry if it comes across that way. I really didn't hate it, I just didn't love it and wanted to give the reasons why. I think it was a competent novel (heck, I couldn't write anything this good....feel I need to say that because the last thing I need is someone angry or stalking me, but it's true, I couldn't write anything this good!), but wish it had been taken up a notch to make it a *\*really\** good novel because then it would have been memorable.

As I said up front, some people are really going to like this one. You might be one of those folks.

*\*I received an advance copy from Penguin Books in exchange for an absolutely honest review of the book.*

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### **Christine says**

*\*\* I received this in a Goodreads "First Reads" giveaway \*\**

Jennifer Lewis is so certain that everything in her life is perfect she is not even worried when the phone rings in the middle of the night. Regrettably for the Lewis family, the axiom holds true, and the phone call is very bad news. Their daughter Emma, studying abroad in Spain for a year, is being detained as a "person of interest" in the brutal murder of another student which took place in her apartment.

Coming home from a local celebration Emma was unlocking her door when a fellow student threatened her with a knife, pushed her into her apartment and attempted to rape her. Her screams attracted the attention of a good samaritan who fought the rapist and killed him in self-defense. The good samaritan is now, unfortunately, nowhere to be found.

As any mother would, Jennifer rushes to be at her daughter's side and vows to do everything in her power to exonerate her daughter. When Jennifer arrives in Spain she is shocked at the change in her daughter finding her sullen, withdrawn and for some reason angry with her mother. Jennifer always considered herself the

“perfect mother” – always there for her children – she gave up her promising career to stay home and be a mother. She is proud of the fact that she had always been able to solve any of her children’s problems, whether something as simple as Emma’s unhappiness at being in a different class than her best friend or something more serious such as the time Emma was caught cheating on an exam or shoplifting a dress. But can she solve this problem? Particularly when it seems that Emma doesn’t want her help.

Jennifer and her husband Mark hire a top criminal defense attorney to navigate the Spanish legal system and a private investigator to find the mystery man who holds the key to their daughter’s release. Jennifer starts her own investigation by talking to Emma’s friends at school soon not being able to prevent her own doubts from rising to the surface as one story unravels only to be replaced by another.

When I read the description of this book in the Goodreads Giveaway section it struck me as bearing a strong resemblance to the Amanda Knox case very much in the news over the past years. I couldn’t help but think to myself “yeah, another quick fictionalized version of the story to cash in on its notoriety and controversy”. I have followed the Knox case with interest (more avid than some and less avidly than others) and have read other books (not so loosely) based on it, usually with disappointing results. If the book description is meant as a device to get this book into people’s hands … kudos to the marketing team … it works! After all, it did influence me to take a chance on receiving the book by entering the contest. Yes, it involves a young, slightly naïve yet adventurous American student studying overseas. Yes, there is a murder of a fellow student of which she is accused. Yes, there are other small similarities used as jumping off points for “The Perfect Mother” but that is where the comparison ends. After reading the book, my opinion is that if it is a marketing ploy it does the book a great disservice. This book is strong enough to stand on its own two feet. It takes off in a completely different direction. It explores whether sometimes, as parents and particularly mothers, we do too much for our children. Are we doing more harm than good when we intervene in certain situations? It looks at how extreme circumstances affect not only the people directly involved but family and friends as well. Can a marriage already troubled survive the stress of an untenable situation? All that AND it’s a page-turner with a surprise jab at the end! I think this book would lead to some lively book club discussions. Good job Ms. Darnton.

So, giving *The Perfect Mother* all the positive raving why only the 4 star rating? Well, I don’t often say this, but I wish the book had been a little bit longer. I was very intrigued by some of the characters, one example being Roberto Ortiz, the private detective hired by the Lewis family. The non-resolution of his subplot left me a little disappointed and wondering. But maybe that’s a tale for another time?

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### **Carol says**

**The Hook** - As a mother a book with the title *The Perfect Mother* called out to me. Who is this woman? Well, let's find out.

**The Line** – *“Your children can get into trouble without it having anything to do with you.”*

**The Sinker** – A story pulled right out of the headlines, *The Perfect Mother* is an exploration of a parent’s or in this case perhaps, a mother’s worst nightmare. The mother, Jennifer Lewis is the proud mother of Emma Lewis. She’s a Princeton exchange student studying in Spain and all seems well with the world. Then the phone rings in the middle of the night. Everything was so perfect in Jennifer’s world that she didn’t even get that pit in the stomach feeling that those late night calls cause.

“Hello?”

*It was Emma’s voice, shaken and vulnerable, through torrents of tears.*

“Mom.” She sobbed. “You told me not to do anything stupid, and I did.”

Emma, distraught, tells her mother someone was killed and the police think she did it. Jennifer tries to get more information but Emma sobs and begs her mother to just come.

So begins Jennifer Lewis’ fight to save her daughter from a lengthy prison sentence in a foreign country.

Sounds good, doesn’t it? So what went wrong?

I do not have to like characters to like a book. At times, the most despicable people make a book for me. They need to be credible even if unreliable. I couldn’t totally buy into the dialogue, personal conversations or the thoughts that ran through the mind of the characters. The choices and the actions of most key players were just a bit off for me. Descriptions were sometimes stilted and flat. Perhaps my expectations were too high. I expected a gut wrenching experience but my emotions were barely tugged. I did read on. There were times when the dialogue between mother and daughter seemed plausible but there were also times when I just thought, “Oh, come on”. Mediocre.

I love stories that explore what we will do for love or how far we will go to protect our children. Jennifer Lewis is the mother bear of all mother bears but she missed the mark for me.

If you were thinking of reading The Perfect Mother do not let my review change your mind. Reviews have been positive and readers should draw their own conclusions.

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### **Amanda - Go Book Yourself says**

Review also posted @ Go Book Yourself

This was such a gem! I stumbled across this by chance on Netgalley and requested it on a whim. I’m so glad I did. The past few books I’ve read have been mediocre so this was a breath of fresh air.

The perfect mother is a work of fiction but is very reminiscent of the Amanda Knox case.

Jennifer gets a late night phone call from her daughter. When your a parent late night phone calls always set alarm bells ringing. When your child is in a different country it’s 10 times worse. Her daughter Emma has been arrested following the murder of a much loved Spanish teenager whom she accuses of trying to sexually assault her.

Emma expects to bailed out by her mother because that’s the way it’s always been. If Emma has a problem mommy comes to the rescue and offers excuses or gentle persuasion so things swing in her daughter’s favor. Jennifer is the perfect mother. The mother all the other teenagers look up to and feel they can share their

problems with.

This resulted in what seems to be an utterly detestable spoiled teenager. I really just wanted to slap Emma and yell "start telling the truth girly or face life behind bars"! I love it when an author is talented enough to provoke such a reaction in me though! When the media get wind of the case the run with the promiscuous American angle. The whole country is baying for her blood as nothing she says seems to add up and Her sole focus is to protect her vigilante boyfriend Paco. I thought it was very interesting that Paco was such a strong character even though he didn't have a voice in this book.

Jennifer's character is the only one that shined for me. I hated Emma and her fathers attitude to the whole event was so blasé that it was almost unbelievable.

I have to say that the pacing was perfect. I raced through this and found it extremely hard to put down. I changed my mind about Emma several times during the book and was compelled to keep going at the end of every chapter.

The ending was entirely surprising giving Emma's actions throughout the story but it still left my mouth hanging open. I would have loved just one or two more pages!

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If you like crime fiction but are looking for something a little lighter than usual then I'd highly recommend The Perfect Mother. It's a highly engaging, emotionally driven read.

### **Deanna says**

This review is a little late coming as I didn't realize I hadn't yet updated it even though I finished it over a month ago.

This book caught my attention as it's description seemed to have many similarities to the Amanda Knox case.

Jennifer Lewis is shocked when she is awakened in the night by a phone call from her terrified daughter Emma. Calling from Spain Emma begs her mother to come quickly as there has been a murder and she is in jail. Of course Jennifer quickly makes arrangements for the care of her other children and rushes to be with her daughter and help straighten out what must be a huge mistake. As Jennifer fights for her daughter and helps investigate she starts to wonder how well she knows her daughter.

The book held my interest well as I really wanted to know what happened the night of the murder. Also being a mother to a teenage girl this book brings up the question of how far would I go to save my daughter? As mothers of course we want to fix everything for our children. However, when we do too much for them are we doing more harm than good when we intervene in certain situations?

I recommend this book. It is well written, with a good plot and flows at a good pace.

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### **Erin says**

ARC for review.

As with the wonderful Cartwheel this book has its base in the Amanda Knox story...beautiful, young, naive college student living abroad is charged with murder. I thoroughly enjoyed this in a "beach book" kind of way. Emma (the daughter) is horrible and awful - you love to hate her - seriously, you are nineteen or twenty and jailed in a foreign country and you want to give the police and detectives speeches about social justice? Idealism is great and all, but you know what isn't so great? Twenty years in a foreign prison, that's what. If Jennifer were really a "perfect mother" she'd have backhanded Emma across the face when she started that nonsense. But, of course, she doesn't because we learn early on that image is everything to Jennifer. She truly loves her children, but she also loves that they and everything about their lives appears perfect, until now.

There were some interesting secondary characters and a nice location, and I quite enjoyed the end. If you were interested in the Amanda Knox story, you'll enjoy this.

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