



Penance

Kanae Minato , Philip Gabriel (Translator)

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The tense, chilling story of four women haunted by a childhood trauma.

When they were children, Sae, Maki, Akiko and Yuko were tricked into separating from their friend Emily by a mysterious stranger. Then the unthinkable occurs: Emily is found murdered hours later.

Sae, Maki, Akiko and Yuko weren't able to accurately describe the stranger's appearance to the police after the Emily's body was discovered. Asako, Emily's mother, curses the surviving girls, vowing that they will pay for her daughter's murder.

Like *Confessions*, Kanae Minato's award-winning, internationally bestselling debut, *Penance* is a dark and voice-driven tale of revenge and psychological trauma that will leave readers breathless.

Penance Details

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Author : Kanae Minato , Philip Gabriel (Translator)

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From Reader Review Penance for online ebook

Diane S ? says

Five ten year old friends go to, their school to play, only four will return alive. The mother of the girl who does not return, threatens the remaining girls, telling them that by the time the statute of limitations is expired on her daughter's murder, the remaining girls must either write a confession or perform an act of penance.

I read this author's novel Confession last year and found it intriguing, and really loved the insidious nature of evil it depicted . This premise sounded equally intriguing and it did start well, with the same creepy overtone but this is where the similarities ended. These novels are told in an very dispassionate voice, which adds to tension the scenarios provoke, and this one also duplicated that tone. Yet, the stories told by each girl were at times repetitious which is to be expected because many of the details of the murders were the same, but the stories about their lives after the crime and threat, went on too long, at least in my opinion. There were unusual revelations, surprising reveals but in the end found this at times very good and at times boring. So a very mixed read for me, but still a very different type of story.

ARC from Netgalley.

Shaghayegh says

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Vastaa gorgij says

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Dem says

Having loved Confessions I was eager to get my hands on Penance by the same author but unfortunately I

felt *Penance* just didn't cut the mustard and left me feeling a little disappointed.

Set in Japan Four women, haunted by a childhood trauma. What really happened that day--and what followed, for each of them, in the years after?

I love how this author writes and she packs so much in such a short novel, terrific character development but because the story is told from five of the characters viewpoints I found it extremely repetitive and at times confusing. I love the darkness in her stories and while *Penance* has that element running through it I think *Confessions* was much more engrossing and intriguing.

I look forward to reading more by this author in the future and highly recommend *Confessions* if you're looking for a good dark mystery set in Japan.

Blair says

This short, fast-paced novel explores the lives of four young women who are forever altered by a tragedy in their youth. When Sae, Maki, Akiko and Yuka are ten years old, their friend Emily is assaulted and murdered by a man posing as an employee of their school. The murderer is never identified. When the girls are thirteen, Emily's mother Asako invites them to tea and gives them a choice: they must either find Emily's killer within the next fifteen years (before the statute of limitations on murder runs out); spend their lives performing penance for their inability to save her; or suffer Asako's revenge.

Unsurprisingly, this cruel ultimatum has an enduring impact on the children. Each girl blames herself for Emily's death, and through separate first-person narratives – each addressed to Asako – we find out what becomes of them in those fifteen years. Sae believes herself to be 'defective' and refuses to grow up. Maki, tormented by what she sees as her cowardice on the day of the murder, devotes her life to teaching, hoping she will be able to protect her students from any similar threat. Akiko becomes a recluse, spending time with nobody apart from her beloved brother Koji and his stepdaughter Wakaka. Yuka develops an obsession with the police, and begins shoplifting so they'll pay attention to her. Finally, we hear from Asako herself.

Penance has strong momentum and is initially intriguing; this is particularly true of the creepy first chapter. However, it runs out of steam somewhere in the final third, and Asako's 'explanation' is a little convoluted and not very satisfying. I liked this book, and it was an easy read, but I don't think it will stick in my memory for long.

*I received an advance review copy of *Penance* from the publisher through NetGalley.*

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Matt says

Kanae Minato is back with another bone-chilling psychological thriller that will keep the reader guessing as they process the various angles of a similar event. When four young girls in a town along the Japanese countryside accept a new girl into their group the dynamic changes drastically. Emily brings a Tokyo flavour to their playing and the entire school class turns to her for guidance. While the girls are playing one day, a stranger approaches them and asks Emily to help him. Not sensing any danger, no one raises a red flag and it

is only hours later, when Emily's body is found in the boys' change room, that these four girls begin to wonder what might have happened. Thus begins the panic, as no one can quite remember how to describe this man. Emily's distraught mother vows vengeance if the girls do not come forward with information to find Emily's killer, a pall that seems to hover over these four. As the story unfolds, all four girls are now women, telling their perspective of events and some of the fallout in their own lives since the killing. While each has a similar theme, there are strong differences, as well as the way in which this 'curse' works its way into their adult lives. Most haunting of all is that, at the time of the murder, Japan had a fifteen year statute of limitations on the crime, which is now only days away. Chilling in its delivery, Minato offers the reader a glimpse into how the innocence of youth can be negated with one wrong choice. Recommended for those who love something a little eerie and can handle a translated piece.

I discovered Kanae Minato and her debut novel this past summer, which had me highly curious. I could not put my finger on it at the time, but her multi-perspective narrative and quaint way of presenting the Japanese customs left me wanting to read more, yet not fully comfortable. In this piece, Minato returns with another story that uses four protagonists as they recount their own views on the murder of young Emily. Minato weaves together both a strong backstory and interesting character developments of all four girls/women, including the acts that might seemingly be part of the curse for not coming forward sooner. The reader is forced to parse fact from fiction while living through these events to get to the final truth. In a piece that flows so well and yet has moments of being quite dense, Minato lures the reader in and will not let go until everything is resolved, at least to her own liking. The writing style is unique and its translation into English has me wondering if it is the linguistic change that gives it the sing-song innocence or whether this is the traditional style of Japanese fiction work. I suppose I will have to investigate more, hoping other Japanese authors have themes similar to those found here.

Kudos, Madam Minato, for another great novel that had me unsure where things were going. I like this sort of blind ride, as it is a dose of something completely different.

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

A Book for All Seasons, a different sort of Book Challenge: [https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...](https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/)

Dianne says

I loved this completely bizarre and unlikely story of friendship, guilt, unintended consequences and revenge. I ate it up in one breathless afternoon. It is surreal and more than a bit disturbing. The author, according to Wikipedia, *"has been described in Japan as "the queen of iyamisu."* Iyamisu (eww mystery) is a subgenre of mystery fiction which deals with grisly episodes and the dark side of human nature. Readers blurt out "eww" when they are reading iyamisu novels."

Well, okay, I get that. There were a few "eww" moments here (warning - there are a more than a few perverted scenarios here, some involving children, although they are not dwelt on or overly graphic). What I liked was the writing, the character driven plot, and the inventive way the author pulls her story and characters together. I see Minato's writing criticized in some reviews, but I believe this novel was written in a very detached and simplistic style for a reason and is all the more affecting because of it. Like the beautiful and arresting cover, it is STARK.

I can't recommend this because I suspect the "eww" factor is going to be too much to overcome for many readers - but I thought it was remarkable.

Sarah says

Kanae Minato is SO IMPRESSIVE. Seriously, she is insanely talented and I feel like she deserves to be one of the big names in writing, she's that good. She expertly weaves these stories about despicable and/or lost characters that are shocking, compelling and explosive. I have read two of her books that have been translated - this one & Confessions and they are both awesome. In fact, they're so awesome that I've been pushing her books onto anyone who will give me the time of day! I recommended her two books to my sister, who isn't the biggest reader and she read them both in the space of like 2 days which is unheard of!

This book isn't as strong as Confessions. It's a little bit predictable but it still has so many twists and turns that it's insane. And the thing about Minato is her twists don't feel forced, it doesn't feel like she is manipulating the reader or adding twists in just for shock value, it feels so natural and that is so hard to do. The story itself is wild. It's a crazy ride from start to finish.

The way she tells the story is also done really well. She breaks her story into different POV's and each person sees things and remembers things differently. Also as the book progresses, you get more and more information so you end up getting a look at a story that is very three-dimensional and complex because the characters each offer something different in their POV and so you're seeing it from all sides of the story. Minato also does it so that even though the characters may be telling the same story, I never felt like she was repeating herself just to make it longer.

The writing was good. Minato's writing style is very addictive and she writes in the second person which is quite unusual but she uses letters to tell the story. It does take a small bit of time to get into that style but once you adjust, you're hooked. I thought this book was well-written and the pacing was perfect.

I would 100% recommend this! I would also read more by Minato!

*I don't want to give anything away but if you have any serious triggers, you might want to look up trigger warnings before you decide to read this.

Liz Barnsley says

I read Confessions from this author and loved it, a one sitting read and Penance was another one sitting read. It was strange and dark, occasionally heart breaking and beautifully done. Translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel I was immediately hooked in to this tale of a group of children caught up in the horrific murder of one of their friends, a sinister threat from the girls mother and how that affected them growing up..

Penance is less a murder mystery and more a character drama – the murder, and the mothers emotionally charged “threat” setting off a chain of life events for the 4 girls and indeed for the mother herself. Each girl tells her tale, about that day and about their lives after, all of them in one way or another end up paying that “Penance” that was demanded of them at a young and impressionable age. Kanae Minato really delves into personality here, taking us on a twisted, atmospheric journey through the lives of these characters, whose

realities differ so much but all are tied into a seemingly unbreakable bond to that one event.

The cultural aspects are equally involving, as I read I got a real sense of both the differences and the similarities between life in Japan and life here – there are different expectations, different society rules and hierarchy, but people are people everywhere. Grief, love, trauma, those things have no borders and I was struck by how beautifully the author managed to portray the feelings, the passion, the core heart of everyone we meet within the pages.

Utterly riveting, everything in *Penance* hovers underneath the surface, the decisions made, the actions taken, all informed by the past at differing levels. The plotting is taut and extraordinarily clever, its not until you come to the end of *Penance* and look back at it that you understand fully the complete tragedy. Because *Penance* is a tragedy, almost Shakespearean in nature, I devoured every word of it with a shivery intensity.

Absolutely Highly Recommended.

Eve says

Until 2010, Japan had a fifteen-year statute of limitations on the crime of murder...

What a unique, dark and disturbing read. I breezed through this! I was expecting a creepy, thriller sort of read based on the premise of the book. However, it dealt more with complex relationships between girls and women after a traumatic event. I did find some things hard to believe, though and struggled with certain plot heavy scenes. But taken as a light, easy read....it was pretty entertaining.

David Yoon says

assaulted and dead. The killer is never found. The girls are unable to describe him or even consistently identify the color of his clothes. The bereaved mother demands that the remaining four girls find the killer or perform an act of penance lest they suffer her revenge. 15 years later we get the story of each of these girls.

The set up is simple enough and from there we get a collection of connected short stories told from the perspective of the remaining 4 girls. Some have the looming creepiness of a Stephen King short while others play out like a Korean revenge drama.

I found the different narrative voices to be a little too passively similar and the unfortunate coincidences of each of the girls situation, only tangentially tied to the initial act, beggared belief. But within the confines of the genre it worked well and there were several moments where Minato earns her title of the queen of iyamisu (or ewww mysteries).

Lisa says

The reason I enjoy Kanae Minato's writing and storytelling so much is because it is quintessentially Japanese. This book was fascinating to me, and though I didn't think it was as strong as her first book,

Confessions, I savored every page. The plots and characters of Minato's books are so specifically Japanese that I'm surprised (and thrilled) that they get translated into English. I hope that the success of Minato's work means more translated Japanese fiction of all kinds. I'll be first in line (or second, behind Randee ;) 4.5 stars.

Jennifer says

Innocence, trauma, blame, guilt, grudges, grief, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...penance. Five children are playing, one is lured away, only four return home to their families. This novel focuses on the four little girls left behind, and of course the angry, grieving mother of the deceased. Why didn't the sicko pick you instead? Why don't you know more about what happened? Why hasn't the perp been caught yet? It's all your fault!

OMG, the premise of this novel is so emotionally complex. The reader watches these four girls grow up into women and sees how this trauma has impacted them throughout each of their unique perspectives. Not only the trauma of losing a childhood friend to ill-intent though, but also the trauma of being threatened by the mother: Catch the killer or perform an act of penance. Simple, impulsive words. What the mother doesn't see in her hate and rage and grief though is these girls' acts of penance are as natural as breathing. Life with unresolved trauma just doesn't relent.

It's easy to sell this book. I mean, I've almost talked myself into a re-read. But the reading experience for me didn't meet its amazing potential. With all of these dynamics going on, the powerful 5-star impact was more like a 3. There was a quietness amidst all of these written dynamics and emotions that prevented everything from being fully palpable in my opinion. I empathized but didn't 100% feel. However, if this plotline interests you or if you have historically enjoyed Ms. Minato's work, it is definitely worth checking out.

Note: I listened to *Penance* via audiobook and it was well-done. A huge distraction though was the lack of identifying who's perspective was being read. I would figure it out after a minute but still. Not sure if this was also an issue when reading off the page but thought it was worth mentioning.

My favorite quote:

"When you love a person, you don't need someone else's permission to be with them."

Edward Lorn says

I burned through the last 75% of this in one extended sitting. I only stopped to eat, use the bathroom, and update my status on Goodreads when something remarkable happened, which was quite often, I must say.

Penance was the perfect book for me at this moment in my life. I've grown impatient with the same old, same old, and this book was anything but that. Oddest of all is, I should have hated this book. It does three things that usually annoy the fuck out of me:

#1. It has something I call the "Vantage Point Plot", wherein one dramatic scene is told from a bunch of different viewpoints. That normally gets old real quick, but here it was fresh because every chapter showed you the aftereffects of each individual, and each aftereffect was drastically different. Some were creepy as balls, others were tense, some were sad, but every single one of them was interesting. Thank fuck for that miracle.

#2. This is basically a mosaic novel. I've not had great success with mosaic novels. If you don't know what one is, I'll give you a brief explanation. A mosaic novel is a series of vignettes or short stories that are connected by one central event or theme. Here it works because we're so close to each character. The detailed explanations of each character's life at the beginning of their chapters might bore some of you. They bored me a bit. But by the end of each chapter I saw just how needed all that information was. Be patient with this one. Each section pays off.

#3. First-person POVs from multiple characters. This is a style I can't fucking stand. It rarely works well, especially when each character is speaking to someone off screen, as it were, like in novels based on an interview structure, but here it fits perfectly. In fact, any book I read from here on out that has chapters from different first-person POVs will be stacked and judged against this novel. It was so well done. I was never confused as to who's head I was in because each and every person got their own quarantined section. Beautiful.

Finally, this was just an easy read. Something I didn't have to think too hard about, but not so simple that I thought the author was speaking down to me. The translation is terrific. I don't *feel* that anything was lost in translation. I can't say that for certain, seeing as I don't speak Japanese and have not read the original text, but usually you can sit back and say, "Something about that doesn't sound right."

In summation: I am happy as hell that I snagged this one off NetGalley in return for the review you just read. I'll likely buy this in hardcover or paperback or whichever format it comes out in upon release in the States. It's rare that I buy books I've received ARCs of, but this will more than likely be one of them... as long as it's decently priced. You never know with this translated novels, seeing as how they have to essentially pay two authors. If you like your mysteries built with abnormal frames, give this one a look-see.

Final Judgment: Some of everything and not a thing bad.

Susan says

I loved "Confessions," by Japanese author, Kanae Minato, so I was delighted to be given her latest novel, which has appeared in translation, for review. This is not a typical 'crime' novel, so I suppose my best description of it would be 'literary crime;' although in Japan, Minato is known as, "the queen of iyamisu," (literally, a 'eww' mystery – where readers blurt out, "Eww" while reading her books. I am not sure I agree with this, but certainly much of the substance of this novel lies beneath the surface and it is a dark and disturbing plot.

The novel revolves around a group of friends in a small, rural town. The town is known for its fresh and clean air, which results in a company which makes precision instruments moving there; much to the consternation of the workforce, who come largely from Tokyo. While they bemoan the lack of 'cram' schools and good shops, and the locals view them as exotic and unusual, one of the newcomers, Emily, makes friends with a group of local girls – Sae, Maki, Akiko and Yuko. One day the five schoolgirls are playing when they are approached by a man and, some hours later, Emily is found murdered.

It is worth pointing out that, at the time of this book, there was a statute of limitations during which criminals could be charged and so there is fifteen years to find the murderer. Emily's mother informs the girls that they have a choice – they must either discover who the murderer is or she will expect a penance from them... As the statute of limitations draws near, we are introduced to the girls as women and discover what implications

those childhood events had on their lives.

I found this a beguiling, beautifully written novel. As we hear what has happened to Sae, Maki, Akiko, Yuko and Emily's mother, secrets are unearthed and tragedies unfold. The author allows the characters to speak to us directly and so we learn a lot about Japanese culture, expectations and behaviour along the way. It was interesting to see how rural Japanese communities are viewed by those in the big cities and of the way that so many newcomers in the town allowed the crime to be committed – respect for adults, combined with no longer expecting to know everyone in a rural community, allowed a stranger to commit a crime virtually unchallenged.

However, this novel is not really about the crime; although central to the storyline, this is far more about the aftermath of events and of how the words of Emily's mother resonates through the girls lives. I am a great admirer of Kanae Minato's writing and I hope more of her books appear in translation soon. A wonderful read and this would be a great book group choice, with so much to discuss. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, to review.
