



Too Pretty To Live: The Catfishing Murders of East Tennessee

Dennis Brooks

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In this stunning true crime thriller of Facebook, catfishing, and jealousy, a double-murder begins with the click of a button.

When Bill Payne and Billie Jean Hayworth began their romance, they unknowingly set in motion a diabolical plot that would end with them murdered in their own home, Hayworth holding their mercifully unharmed infant.

Chris was a CIA agent who was concerned about Jenelle. Seeing the cyberbullying she had endured, and worried for her safety, Chris got in touch with Jenelle's protective parents, and her devoted boyfriend, warning them that Payne and Hayworth were a danger to Jenelle. He got especially close with Jenelle's mother, Barbara, who thought of Chris like a son, though she had never met him. Chris claimed that surveillance of Payne and Hayworth revealed that the two of them were planning on harming Jenelle, that it was imminent, and that something needed to be done immediately. Chris promised that he would have their back if they were to act to protect Jenelle.

And so they did. Jenelle's father, Buddy, and her boyfriend, Jamie, broke into the home of Payne and Hayworth and murdered them in their own home.

What the police investigation turned up, though, made this crime all the more terrifying. Jenelle had been Chris the entire time, catfishing her family and her boyfriend to act in vengeance on her behalf. Using forensic linguistics and diving through the brambles that Jenelle laid to cover her tracks, police were able to put together a chilling portrait of a sociopath, made all the more ruthless by the anonymity of her online life.

Bizarre and unforgettable, Dennis Brooks examines the crime and trial from all angles, bringing his expertise as the lead prosecutor in the strange and disturbing case.

Too Pretty To Live: The Catfishing Murders of East Tennessee Details

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Hari Brandl says

Two main questions I feel I need to ask prior to venting my opinion of this book: 1) What makes a lawyer feel he/she can write a story? 2) Where are the editors who are supposed to be helping these lawyers write stories? Diversion books has failed Dennis Brooks.

A) His faulty grammar should have been corrected: he mixes up "I" and "me" often, over uses/inappropriately-uses "had" too many times to count. His syntax is awkward at best and incomprehensible at worst. His use of split infinitives is reminiscent of high school errors (even though splitting infinitives is accepted now it makes for uneasy reading).

B) His writing itself leaves much to be edited. He identifies most major characters early, victims and perpetrators, but around page 39 in my edition he mentions Jaime Curd being interrogated, but has not identified him nor stated his relationship to the main actors or the crime. Not until around page 100 does he reveal that Jaime is the boyfriend of Jennell, and not until even later does he place Jaime at the scene of the crime.

C) He quotes way too many long, ridiculous emails written by the main actors, complete with misspellings, run-on sentences, lazy abbreviations, no punctuation, etc, then underlines the critical parts, and additionally recaps the important parts. What's the point of all of that: filler?

D) His use of pronouns is inexact and confusing.

The result is a totally frustrating book which is a pity, since the story he is trying to tell is so interesting. I hate it when that happens!

Valerity (Val) says

The unfriending murders.

This is quite a modern day murder story about a double killing and how it ties to the Internet. An unusual case where those most responsible weren't even present when it happened and yet charges were brought. There was a lot of investigation in this "catfishing" case to bring the real story to light when it could have been overlooked. Some real strange characters in this and not the ones you'd expect.

Steph says

Interesting true crime story that was not presented well. Repetitive and trite, the story was not unfolded, you are awkwardly and abruptly exposed to it. You'd be better off listening to the Sword and Scale podcast coverage of this story.

Alisi ? wants to read too many books ? says

Straight and to the point. I found the case to be interesting. I really appreciated that the attorney didn't take the opportunity to make pot-shots at the defendant. I was really at the point where I didn't think it was possible to read a book on a case by a prosecutor and not have it riddled with low blows like 'this homely girl thought she was beautiful' or the like (this the amount of times the defendants beauty was brought up by the defendant.)

I took a star off because it didn't feel balanced. He never delved into the other side of this whole thing. It was just the defendants actions and a tiny bit at the end of 'maybe there was a little to her accusations after all.' Phone records and the like would've been brought up during the trial and they were convicted so I don't think it would've detracted from his case to mention that in here.

FabulousRaye says

Too annoying to listen to. Uneducated adults and manufactured facebook drama ends in murder.

The Romance Book Disciple (Samantha) says

I enjoyed that this book because it was from the prosecutors POV and not the media or anything. I think because he was the prosecutor he focused more on the evidence and I prefer my true crime to be fact based and not have a narrative bent.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

This crime is absolutely ludicrous! 30 and 60 year olds acting like they are in high school and then leading to murder. Social media is the devil.

Charlene says

This was definitely one of the most bizarre cases I have read. My head is still spinning, trying to understand how a father, a mother, and a daughter could all share in such a strange world view. It seems like a bonafide instance of a folie au deux, though it was not labeled as such in this book.

Brooks was the prosecutor in this case. At times that made the story more enjoyable and at times less. He contended that lie detection, though not admissible in court, was a valuable investigative tool. The reason lie detection is not admissible is precisely because it is in fact not a good investigative tool. Brooks assertion that it was made me wonder about his critical thinking skills. That said, there is little doubt that this entire family was culpable. Even though there were times Brooks reflected on various challenges prosecutors face, I felt he could have done a much better job of delving deeper into those challenges.

Jazmine says

This was the most confusing and complicated crime I've ever read about, I even had to grab a notepad and make a "cheat sheet" of all the people involved and their connections to Jenelle's family and this murder. All confusion aside, this book was very well written and easy to read. Dennis Brooks did an excellent job providing information about these senseless murders.

♥ Marlene♥ says

Ugh. Hard to read. I have read 32 percent and this book is confusing as heck. Yes I understand it is a confusing case but how the author began this book is not one I like. From the beginning we are bombarded with names with at first no explanation and then there are tons of emails with no interpunction at all and so many typos. I know these kind of people exist because I have some on fb and they are always fighting on there which is amusing for me to read but in a way sad.

That being said I did read one third in one session while that normally takes me longer.

Off to read more.

Update April 12 2016

Terrible terrible. I became so bored after a while reading the same rants and awful emails. That sounds good no? Reading someone else's private conversations? Especially a crazy person's but I can assure you no it becomes tedious.

The book could have been better. More understanding of the Potter family and to get to know all the other characters a bit more.

Even the trial which I looked forward to made me fall asleep. Hardly any info about the people that were killed or their friends except that a lot of names were in the emails and it got confusing and not interesting.

(view spoiler)

Alas I do not recommend.

Wendi Manning says

I truly understand that the prosecutor was proud of his work on a very difficult and complicated case, but I read true crime to learn about both the bad guys and the good guys. There just wasn't enough here to tell the story. It really was only about the prosecution, not the victims or the actual story leading up to the murders. I felt like I just read the trial prep and not an actual book. The story itself seemed fascinating though.

Fishface says

This was a mostly-interesting account of a very, very odd murder case. It sort of dragged in the beginning but then picked up steam, and I really wanted to find out how it played out in court. This would have been a spoiler-free TC story if the knucklehead who designed the jacket hadn't included a blurb that spoiled almost every single surprise between the covers. The photo section gave nothing away and the author didn't ruin it for you during the introduction. I'm glad I read to the very end, where another revelation was waiting for me. "Grammar Nazis" will hate this book, but for me it was worth the white-knuckle journey through those nutty e-mails. I feel horrible for the jury, who had 207 pages of that stuff to read through! Note to author: if you're going to criticize other people's punctuation and spelling, you need to brush up your own usage and punctuation before going to press.

Kathie says

Fascinating case. It's really sad how a couple of people can manipulate other people to kill.

Lital says

Wow. Just wow. I first heard about this book through the Podcast "True Murder" and it was so fascinating and seemed so layered that I absolutely had to read it. I also really wanted to get my hands on those emails and read as much of it as I could. This book did not disappoint. It gave me everything I wanted, full characterization including the narrator as a character, which was fantastic. He was the DA Prosecutor on the case and his insight was delightful. The book was a page turner, you never knew when you were going to get surprised with one fact over another. The chapters also were just divided really well chronologically and also by specific subject. And those subjects often reflected either exhibits or testimony so that the book was a pleasure to read and all the information made sense. It was really good.

Jen from Quebec :0) says

This story was so nuts it SEEMS like it could be non-fiction but it is sadly too real. Janelle Potter, a woman in her 30s with strict, gun-toting parents, functions at a 4th grade reading level, is socially outcast and lives her life on the computer, namely Facebook. When she is slighted in love by a man named Billy who goes on to father a child with a woman named Billie-Jean, Janelle begins a crazy online scheme in which she pretends to be a CIA operative named Chris and convinces her own parents that this couple, Billy and Billie-Jean are out to harm Janelle and her family, and that he is keeping them under CIA surveillance. Eventually everything escalates to the point that Janelle and 'Chris' convince her father and a family friend to actually murder this couple in order to protect Janelle. It is all true, there are stories of it all over the internet, but the audio book was full of details including the exact text messages and emails and so forth. A harrowing tale, one that true crime readers would love, and one that makes me shake my head at the world and people in general. Sad stuff. --Jen from Quebec :0)

