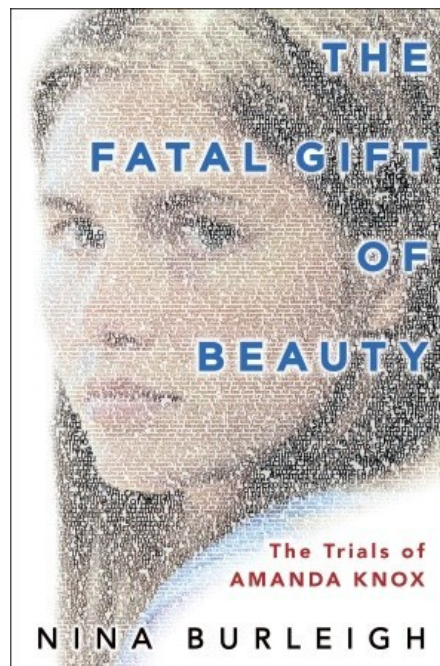




The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox

Nina Burleigh

Download now

Read Online ➔

The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox

Nina Burleigh

The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox Nina Burleigh

The sexually violent murder of twenty-one-year-old British student Meredith Kercher in Perugia, Italy, on the night of November 1, 2007, became an international sensation when one of Kercher's housemates, twenty-year-old Seattle native Amanda Knox, as well as her Italian boyfriend and a troubled local man Knox said she "vaguely" knew, was arrested and charged with the murder. The Fatal Gift of Beauty is award-winning author and journalist Nina Burleigh's mesmerizing literary investigation of the murder, the controversial prosecution, the conviction and twenty-six-year sentence of Knox, the machinations of Italian justice, and the underground depravity and clash of cultures in one of central Italy's most beloved cities.

When Perugia authorities concluded that the murder was part of a dark, twisted rite—a "sex game"—led by the American with an uncanny resemblance to Perugia's Madonna, they unleashed a media frenzy from Rome to London to New York and Seattle. The story drew an international cult obsessed with "Foxy Knox," a pretty honor student on a junior year abroad, who either woke up one morning into a nightmare of superstition and misogyny—the dark side of Italy—or participated in something unspeakable.

The investigation begins in the old stone cottage overlooking bucolic olive groves where Kercher's body was found in her locked bedroom. It winds through the shadowy, arched alleys of Perugia, a city of art that is also a magnet for tens of thousands of students who frequent its bars, clubs, and drug bazaar on the steps of the Duomo. It climaxes in an up-close account of Italy's dysfunctional legal system, as the trial slowly unfolds at the town's Tribunale, and the prosecution's thunderous final appeal to God before the quivering girl defendant resembles a scene from the Inquisition.

To reveal what actually happened on that terrible night after Halloween, Nina Burleigh lived in Perugia, attended the trial, and corresponded with the incarcerated defendants. She also delved deeply into the history, secrets, and customs of Perugia, renowned equally for its Etruscan tunnels, early Christian art, medieval sorcerers, and pagan roots.

The Fatal Gift of Beauty is a thoughtful, compelling examination of an enduring mystery, an ancient, storied place, and a disquieting facet of Italian culture: an obsession with female eroticism. It is also an acute window into the minds and personalities of the accused killers and of the conservative Italian magistrate striving to make sense of an inexplicable act of evil. But at its core is an indelible portrait of Amanda Knox, the strangely childlike, enigmatic beauty, whose photogenic face became the focal point of international speculation about the shadow side of youth and freedom.

The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox Details

Date : Published August 2nd 2011 by Broadway Books (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780307588586

Author : Nina Burleigh

Format : Hardcover 306 pages

Genre : Crime, True Crime, Nonfiction, Biography, Mystery, Cultural, Italy, History

 [Download The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox ...pdf](#)



[Read Online The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox Nina Burleigh

From Reader Review The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox for online ebook

Amaya says

I loved the detail, the immersion in the case, the depiction of the involved. Very well researched, and proves Amanda is innocent.

Matt says

I am ~~utterly fascinated~~ ~~frighteningly obsessed~~ interested to a normal degree about true crime. Accordingly, I am an avid watcher of *Dateline* and *48 Hours* and any other show that spends an hour in the dark heart of man. Being a criminal defense attorney, I suppose I could chalk it up to curiosity. But that would be a lie. In truth, I have a fever, and the only cure is more Keith Morrison.

I've been following the Amanda Knox murder trial for years, now. I first saw it on a primetime special, when the story initially broke, and have checked in periodically since. It has everything that you want in a murder mystery, especially (a) a murder; and (b) a mystery. The location helps set the story apart: the ancient and beautiful Italian city of Perugia. It also features an attractive white female victim, which is – to be brutally honest – the *sine qua non* for a television producer to feature a case. The bonus twist to this story – the propellant that made this murder a lasting international sensation – is the identity of the alleged killer, who also happened to be an attractive white female.

In 2007, American Amanda Knox was arrested for the murder of British roommate Meredith Kercher. Though the title of Nina Burleigh's book is taken from Byron referring to Italy, "the fatal gift of beauty" really refers to Amanda herself. It was her youthful beauty, her sexuality, and her guilelessness that allowed an unscrupulous and possibly-mad Italian prosecutor to turn an obvious case of break-in/rape/murder into an orgiastic Satanic ritual, with Amanda Knox in control.

I think it's safe to say that if Knox looked like a stack of old telephone books, the case never would have proceeded as it did.

She didn't, though, and a long nightmare ensued.

On the night of December 4, 2009, Knox and her Italian boyfriend Rafaele Sollecito were found guilty of Kercher's murder. It is here that Burleigh's book begins, at what seemed like the end (published in 2011, two years after Knox's conviction, this edition has been revised in 2012 to reflect the reversal of the trial court's decision).

After this prologue, Burleigh devotes the first two parts of her book (there are four parts in all) to a rather fragmented scene-setting. She bounces from Italy to Seattle and back to Italy again in describing the participants, the murder scene, the city of Perugia.

The book's construction belies a simple chronological approach, and instead strives for something more. There is a sympathetic telling of African-Italian Rudy Guede's upbringing. Guede – the actual murderer in this case – came from a hardscrabble immigrant family, was given a chance to live with a wealthy Italian family, blew that, and ended up a smalltime break-in artist whose DNA eventually ended up on a dead girl. Burleigh also does a nice job describing the gothic history and decayed present of Perugia, where all the

problems of a modern city exist on ancient cobblestoned streets.

Woven throughout this text is a meditation on young womanhood. In this way, *The Fatal Gift of Beauty* partially plays out like *In Cold Blood* as written by Susan Faludi (or an episode of *Girls* written and directed by David Simon). It's an interesting angle, and certainly relevant; it's hard to dispute that certain narrow cultural views of women, especially Italy's Madonna/whore dichotomy, played a large role in shaping the prosecution. (YouTube videos of Knox partying – like every single other college student in history – helped ensure her initial conviction. Meanwhile, the British tabloids always made great hay out of the fact that Knox was – gasp! – sexually active).

While reading these contemplations, it's easy to think that Burleigh felt some sort of kinship to Amanda Knox, especially as she described Knox's transformation from soccer-loving tomboy to legitimate beauty, and the impact this had on others and herself. This is a typical female coming-of-age story, with all the awkwardness, fits-and-starts, and constant second-guessing that entails. Unfortunately, Knox's entrée to young adulthood also meant being sucked into the gravitational pull of a sensationalized murder.

I applaud Burleigh's attempt to transcend the bounds of straightforward true crime reporting. Ambition is never a bad thing. The attempt for a higher literary plane, however, can lead to a certain amount of confusion. Those unfamiliar with the case will likely have a hard time navigating the chronological fluidity, the narrative reshuffling, and the meandering digressions. And there is also a little matter of the prose, which often veers into purple and silly.

The initial shakiness of parts one and two disappears in the second half of the book. Here, Burleigh follows a more traditional path: investigation, trial, aftermath. She does a nice job explaining and comparing the Italian legal system to our own. It is tempting to think that an American court never would've allowed such a shoddy railroading of a suspect...but American courts do it all the time. Nothing happened in Italy that doesn't occur in Texas criminal courts every day. And at least in Italy, the appellate process allows for a de novo review.

Lost in this story – and in most accounts of the Knox murder trial – is the victim. That's not Knox's fault, or even Burleigh's. When Prosecutor Mignini (who threatened American author Douglas Preston while he was researching his book on the Monster of Florence) decided to build a case upon the basis of his own superstitions and belief in the occult, he's the one who changed the focus of the story. He created a second and third victim, young adults who had to spend years in prison due to an unethical prosecutor's fever dreams.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of Knox's innocence, and the fact that most of the "evidence" against Knox either doesn't exist or was grossly distorted, *The Fatal Gift of Beauty* does not attempt any sort of defendant's brief. Burleigh never set out to prove that Knox had been wrongfully convicted. There is no point-by-point destruction of the prosecution's flimsy case, their ethical breaches, or their forensic ineptitude.

There are many other places to find that information. Burleigh is more interested in contemplating the unfortunate intersection of a young American woman and an old Italian culture. It makes for a thoughtful look at a case that was anything but.

Clint says

I admit it. Until I read this book, I thought this girl was guilty. After reading this a an a full supporter of Amanda Knox. For one reason, Italy was set against her and she was arraigned again (and found guilty again) even though her appeal overturned the first ruling. This is about being in the wrong place at the wrong time--namely Italy during a murder case. It is well written, thoroughly researched, and sets the tone of what Amanda Knox is really like--an awkward college girl with social mishaps. She reminds me of myself. At times I felt the author was showing off some of the depths she dug to give us the but I thought it was a good perspective of the facts. Amanda was unjustly accused and found guilty of a crime she obviously didn't commit.

I just don't know how she was found guilty again this case again. I am not sure how she was sentenced AGAIN. I eventually someday she will be free before her max sentence.

Sheila says

I admit it. Until I read this book, I thought this girl was guilty. For one reason, Italy was set against her and she was arraigned again (and found guilty again) even though her appeal overturned the first ruling. This is about being in the wrong place at the wrong time--namely Italy during a murder case. It is well written, thoroughly researched, and sets the tone of what Amanda Knox is really like--an awkward college girl with social mishaps mixed with too much dope. At times I felt the author was showing off some of the depths she dug to give us the story (the ending where she compares Amanda to the two Mary's of Perugia was a little far fetched and lost me) but I thought it was a good perspective of the facts. Amanda was unjustly accused and found guilty of a crime she obviously didn't commit. Regardless of whether you think she did, there never was enough evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt. However Italy used Inquisition tactics to persuade a boggled jury, including police brutality, prejudice, and a computer-generated video of the avatar Amanda stabbing avatar Meredith repeatedly.

Lori McLellan says

This book should be read as a cautionary lesson to all parents and their young adult children who are about to venture abroad by themselves, either for pleasure, work, or schooling. No matter how savvy, mature and worldly they may seem, one needs to be aware of each visiting countries cultural sensitives, laws and ideologies. Perhaps if Amanda Knox had been more aware, things may not have escalated as they did, mostly without her even knowing it.

It seems that the Italian prosecutors and judges had blinders on when it came to Amanda who they feel beguiled her two alleged male accomplices and orchestrated the tragic rape and murder of her roommate, Meredith Kercher, who herself was in Italy going to school far from her home in the U.K. Nina Burleigh walks us through from the beginning when Amanda leaves her Seattle home to go to school in Italy to her release after being incarcerated for four years in Italy and returning to the U.S. and how she, to this day, is thought of by the Americans, Italians, and the Brits.

I think we are terribly naive to believe that all laws and outcomes will compare with those in which you live and that by simply being innocent will set you free, especially when you are young without many life lessons under you belt. We need to be aware when we venture outside our borders and this book gives us an example of the tragic consequences when we're not.

Pam Camel says

This book is not what I expected. I expected it to be about Amanda and the trial. It is so much more. Yes the book discusses Amanda and some of the things she went through before the trial. Just a few things were said about the actual trial. Most people followed it while it was happening so you probably do not need the play by play of the trial.

This instead is a look at all the players in the case. The Judge, Amanda, Raffelle, Rudy, Meredith, the roommates, the Magistrate who serves as prosecutor and investigator even though he had no formal criminal investigation training. It also looks at the main police members involved. It tells of their backgrounds what kinds of family they came from.

As you read about the players and how the Italian court system works you can see how someone can be railroaded. Any member of the press whose story did not match those of the prosecution can be jailed. Also anyone who speaks out against the police can find themselves with a slander charge.

It was a interesting insight to the courts and how they are run. How others view Perugia and what it is really seen as. The book makes it out to be kind of a seedy place. Not necessarily unsafe but a lot of drugs and prostitution. I think the author said it best when she said The Italian court system is not wrong it is just different. Anyone facing a court system that they do not know the customs of would not know what to expect or how to behave appropriately. No matter what your feelings on Amanda's guilt or innocence this is an interesting read. You get the sense that the author believes she is innocent but yet she never comes out and directly says it, so you can make your own decision based on the players and how the case was handled.

SenoraG says

I think I am in the minority with my feelings on this book. I did not love this book. I knew next to nothing about Amanda Knox and the horrible crime that she was found guilty of. Normally when you read a true crime book you learn so much more about the crime and the people involved. I did not find that to be the case with this book. I finished it not knowing anymore than I did when I started it.

The author did a lot of research and the book is filled with information but for me, it seemed like unnecessary information or redundant information. It told a lot about Italian history and Perugian history but it was too much. I would have liked to have had more detail on the crime and on Meredith and Amanda Knox. I came away feeling lost and confused.

I think the author did a good job of trying to show Amanda Knox as innocent and unfairly sentenced. That could be, but I didn't come away from the book feeling one way or the other.

If you are a true crime fan and familiar with the case it is worth reading. For one not so familiar with the case I don't know if this is the book to start with. As usual I say, read it yourself and then decide.

University of Chicago Magazine says

Nina Burleigh, AM'87
Author

"Foxy Knoxy," the Italian and British media call her. Voted the 2009 Woman of the Year in an Italian

television-news poll, Amanda Knox, then a 22-year-old University of Washington undergrad on a year abroad in Perugia, was also labeled a “luciferina” and a “dirty-minded she-devil” by a Perugian prosecutor, in his closing statements during her trial for the murder of her British roommate, Meredith Kercher. Convicted in December 2009, Knox was sentenced to 26 years in prison and immediately filed an appeal. Her conviction was overturned October 3.

Journalist Nina Burleigh pieced together mysteries in several of her five nonfiction books, including her 1998 account of the unsolved murder of one of President John F. Kennedy’s mistresses. For *The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Trials of Amanda Knox* (Broadway Books, 2011), Burleigh, who has written for the *New Yorker*, the *Guardian*, and *Time*, moved with her husband and two children to Perugia, an isolated mountain city, to follow the trial. She lived there for about a year, attending the trial from the defense’s opening remarks to the judge’s verdict, reading the case records, and interviewing the players. Although the defense lawyers prevented her from speaking with Knox or the other defendant, her Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, Burleigh communicated with them through letters.

Read our complete interview with Burleigh at <http://mag.uchicago.edu>

Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond says

A compelling, riveting read.

Burleigh took her time to research and explain the cultural / historical context that both Meredith Kercher and Amanda Knox came to meet during their study abroad experiences; which was incredibly helpful in terms of understanding how sexuality, college life, grief, etc could be (mis)construed by the different nationalities involved. It was chilling to imagine the dark side of getting "lost in translation", and, ultimately terribly sad to accept that what actually happened in the horrible moments Meredith was murdered remains a mystery.

Burleigh does not share whether she thinks Knox is guilty or not; and after reading it, I didn't come away with a strong opinion about Knox's guilt or innocence. The book does point out so many loose ends the police didn't properly investigate.

Unfortunately, the high profile nature of the case seems to have made the powers that handled the investigation defensive, rather than willing to accept that they could have done -- and still can do -- some things better to ascertain guilt or innocence beyond the shadow of a doubt. But the thing is, "the shadow of a doubt" standard rules American jury trials, not Italian ones.

Bottom line, the cultural differences that seem quaint and charming when you're on holiday, can be the exact opposite should you get caught on the wrong side of the law in another country. I definitely recommend.

Erika Nerdypants says

I had high hopes for this book, which sadly didn't materialize. Although I enjoyed the writing, and I am generally in favour of indepth character studies and background information, I have to agree with other reviewers on here, there is such a thing as too much information, especially when it leaves you not really knowing all that much in the end. One gets to know Amanda Knox, at least on some level, but who was Meredith? What was their relationship like? There are allusions to quarrels between them, but we never find

out what they were about, or if in fact they did not like each other. The one thing I can agree on with the author, is that Ms. Knox was most likely wrongfully convicted based on the evidence that exists.

Leila Cohan-Miccio says

It's total coincidence that I read this as the Amanda Knox appeal was being decided, but it was a neat tie-in. Obviously, people are falsely accused of crimes every day, only a small minority of whom are pretty white college girls, but the Knox case is still wholly terrifying - this idea that people have just decided that you committed a crime despite the lack of any real evidence to the contrary.

Burleigh overstates her case somewhat - there's probably about 10% too much talk about how much Amanda loved smiles - but it's still a totally compelling book. Also, props for presenting Amanda as a complex character - she is not guilty of murder (there's zero physical evidence suggesting she was in the apartment when it happened and the official theory of a sex game gone wrong made zero sense), but she is probably kind of an asshole, a fact a lesser writer would have glossed over.

Alicia says

This book should have been about 125 pages instead of over 300! I'm not happy with the detailed background history of every policeman, judge, witnesses etc. as well as the total history of Italy. The timeline and revealing of the actual murder doesn't even happen until page 175 but I was already invested that far so I had to keep going.

The difference in handling legal matters in the US compared to Italy is appalling at best. The fact that they originally convicted Amanda purely on hearsay, and the fact that for some reason she had been painted as a "sex goddess" was mind blowing. Considering the intense pressure by the authorities, the physical abuse (hitting Amanda several times in the head) and the lies they created it's amazing that she didn't go completely crazy. They became totally obsessed with her and disregarded true evidence (DNA) pointing to someone else committing the murder; but that person was a citizen of Italy and they couldn't bare to have that type of scandal in the media. They thought it was better to pay any person involved in the media to tell the side of the story that they deemed appropriate and less offensive to their country.

It's awesome that Amanda did get a second chance and I hope this hasn't ruined her spirit and life.

Carol Storm says

Absolutely fascinating book about the true story of Amanda Knox, an American girl studying in Italy who was falsely accused of murder and spent nearly four years in an Italian prison.

Nina Burleigh does an amazing job capturing the Italian setting, the combination of ancient culture, modern crime, violence, and corruption in the town of Perugia. She's not so successful writing about the young college students, however. There's an awful lot of finger-wagging and tut-tut-tutting and some almost comical cheap shots at Amanda's family. (How dare they not learn Italian? How dare they not eat Italian food? Damn those ugly Americans!)

Burleigh is obviously a journalist who's lived in Italy and covered the European beat for years. That's an advantage, of course, but it's not so helpful when her personal silliness and snobbery creep into the narrative. She keeps saying things like, "naturally, Amanda envied Meredith. How would a crass, vulgar, obnoxious American girl who ate with her fingers and picked her nose ever compete with a quiet, sophisticated European girl who comported herself like an adult? Meredith really knew her way around a bidet, while Amanda was barely potty-trained." Right, Nina. Meow! I mean, Ciao!

I kid you not, much of the author's "insight" is on this level.

The biggest disappointment is that the book ends with Amanda in prison. It seems to me the most dramatic twists came afterwards. How did she get released? How did she act when she got sprung? What did she learn from her experiences? What is she like today?

A very good book, but frustrating if you really wanted to know about Amanda Knox, and not hear a lecture from an ever so classy lady journalist about the appalling ignorance of young people, and Americans, and the human race as a whole.

Allegra says

This book is not a flimsy true crime book, the kind that relies on rumor and previously published work. Burleigh did some serious research--historical, social, personal, forensic, and geographic. She provides immense background on all the major players and places, while also keeping a compelling narrative pace. This reads like a novel whose ending I unfortunately already know.

Amanda, Raffaele, Meredith, Rudy, and Mignini are all fully formed, cast as real people with real motives and life stories, not one-note characters who act for seemingly no understandable reason. There is remarkable depth provided on each, and readers are left with a keen awareness of, for instance, why Amanda might have been doing cartwheels outside an interrogation room, or why Mignini was convinced of a conspiracy. The author manages to show how things were taken out of context, distorted, mis-reported, left out, kept secret, ignored, or wrongfully focused on, without ever editorializing or casting aspersions (well deserved aspersions, in my opinion) on investigators. Though this is a book with Amanda's face on the cover and name in the subtitle, I would argue instead that this is the definitive book on the entire case, and all of its parts and players. If you have any interest in this case, this is a must read.

In the case of this trial, to accurately and impartially report the facts is, in my opinion, to show the startling lack of evidence against Amanda and Raffaele. For this reason, it is subtly clear, but clear all the same, that the author believes Amanda should not have been found guilty. At the very end, when she summarizes the two sides of the case, she all but states that there is no real evidence against them. This does not make this book flawed, as many one-sided books are. She demonstrates her complete and full knowledge of the case, the laws, and the facts and assumes nothing. She does not say Amanda is innocent, nor does she dismiss the few things that do seem amiss with Amanda's side of the story. I am grateful the author went to such effort to understand all sides, but again, in this case, a full understanding of the facts seems to indicate a full understanding of the "rail road job from hell."

Hope says

I have such mixed feelings about this book. More conjecture and speculation than fact--it's clear that Burleigh did a lot of research, but like several other reviewers, I feel it's not used well. She interviewed Knox's high school and college classmates, for example, but she is preoccupied with invented-sounding

Seattle class issues and bizarre claims about how Knox must've felt 'poor' and emotionally wrecked by her parents' divorce but hidden it. Burleigh makes similarly lurid claims about Italian culture and stereotyping of women as vixens. Saddest of all, victim Meredith Kerchner fades into the background in favor of talking about the Monster of Florence, Gitmo, and Italian fears about paganism.
