

Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series)

By Paul Cleave

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“*Breaking Bad* reworked by the Coen Brothers.” (*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review)

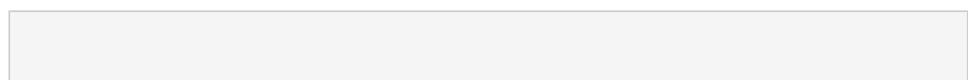
In the latest thriller by the Edgar-nominated author of *Joe Victim*, someone is helping rape victims exact revenge on their attackers, prompting an edge-of-your-seat, cat-and-mouse chase between old friends, detectives Theodore Tate and Carl Schroder.

Carl Schroder and Theodore Tate, labeled “The Coma Cops” by the media, are finally getting their lives back into shape. Tate has returned to the police force and is grateful to be back at home with his wife, Bridget. For Schroder, things are neither good nor bad. The bullet lodged in his head from a shooting six months ago hasn’t killed him, but—almost as deadly—it’s switched off his emotions.

When the body of a convicted rapist is found, obliterated by an oncoming train, Tate works the case, trying to determine if this is murder or suicide. The following night, two more rapists go missing. It’s hard to investigate when everyone on the police force seems to be rooting for the killer.

There’s a common plea detectives get from the loved ones of victims: When you find the man who did this, give me five minutes alone with him. And that’s exactly what someone is doing. Someone is helping these victims get their five minutes alone. But when innocent people start to die, Tate and Schroder find themselves with different objectives, and soon they’re battling something they never would’ve expected—each other.

“Ferocious storytelling that makes you think and feel,” says *The Listener* (New Zealand). Smart, funny, and breathlessly suspenseful, *Five Minutes Alone* takes the definition of “crime thriller” to a whole new level.



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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for FIVE MINUTES ALONE:

“[A] fiendishly twisted thriller.... Cleave’s masterful plotting skills are matched with superior pacing and characterization.” (*Publishers Weekly* (starred review))

“Think vigilante killers have it easy? Cleave offers a macabre, compelling demonstration of how Murphy's Law dogs the efforts of ex-cop Carl Schroder to give victims of violent crime the five minutes alone they crave with the criminals who've ruined their lives.... [It's] *Breaking Bad* reworked by the Coen Brothers.” (*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review))

“[A] powerhouse of a tale... A gripping thriller from beginning to end.” (*Booklist* (starred review))

“I’m having trouble coming up with words to describe how perfect I think this novel is...If you enjoy fast paced, gritty thrillers, and you’ve never read Paul Cleave before, beg/borrow/buy everything he’s ever written. Start at the beginning. You won’t regret it!” (*The Sweet Escape.com*)

Praise for JOE VICTIM:

“Cleave pulls out all the stops in his seventh Christchurch noir.... [He] juggles all the elements with impressive ease. Darkly humorous references to horrific violence will resonate with Dexter fans.” (*Publishers Weekly* (starred))

“A little Hannibal Lector. A little Richard von Krafft-Ebing. A lot of gore” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“Cleave does his usual great job of threading two ongoing stories from two different serials into a single, closely knit unit and as usual, keeps the reader eager for more. It’s hard not to empathize with Joe, even cheering for the bad guy is allowed, if for no other reason, we need to know what he will do next.” (*Suspense Magazine*)

“Clever, compelling, and not for the faint hearted. Joe Middleton is the guiltiest 'innocent man' in crime fiction.” (Michael Robotham, internationally bestselling author of *Watching You*)

Praise for THE LAUGHTERHOUSE:

“An intense adrenalin rush from start to finish, I read *The Laughterhouse* in one sitting. It’ll have you up all night. Fantastic!” (S.J. Watson, New York Times bestselling author of *Before I Go to Sleep*)

“Piano wire–taut plotting, Tate’s heart-wrenching losses and forlorn hopes, and Cleave’s unusually perceptive gaze into the maw of a killer’s madness make this a standout chapter in his detective’s rocky road to redemption.” (*Publishers Weekly* (starred))

“In Cleave’s third psycho-thriller, Theodore Tate is the quintessential flawed hero, a damaged soul hunting deviants in a forest of moral quandaries.... An intense and bloody noir thriller, one often descending into a

violent abyss reminiscent of Thomas Harris, creator of Hannibal Lecter.” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“A wonderful book.... The final effect is that tingling in the neck hairs that tells us an artist is at work.” (*Booklist (starred)*)

“This dark, gripping thriller, the latest in the Tate saga, is as hard-boiled as it gets. The surprise ending suspends all disbelief. Like a TV series that ends its season on a cliffhanger, you won’t want to wait until next year. This will leave the reader clamoring for the next book in the series.” (*Suspense Magazine*)

“Cleave is a master of evoking the view askew; delving into the troubled psyches of conflicted characters. Former cop and convict Theo Tate, stumbling forward in search of some sort of redemption, returns to the scene of his first crime scene, hunting a killer and kidnapper set on revenge. Ferocious storytelling that makes you think and feel. A blood-stained high point in Cleave’s already impressive oeuvre.” (*The Listener (New Zealand), A Best Book of 2012*)

About the Author

Paul Cleave is the internationally bestselling author of ten award-winning crime thrillers, including *Joe Victim*, which was a finalist for the 2014 Edgar and Barry Awards, *Trust No one* and *Five minutes Alone*, which won consecutive Ngaio Marsh awards in 2015 and 2016. He lives in Christchurch, New Zealand. Visit his website at PaulCleave.com.

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Five Minutes Alone

CHAPTER ONE

Kelly Summers didn’t like being out at night. She used to. Years ago she’d party all night and come home in the morning, sometimes only for a splash of deodorant and some fresh makeup, just enough time to change clothes and take a few shots of breath freshener before work. On weekends she’d hit the beach with her friends, maybe have a couple of beers and let the good times roll, but that was years and a different lifetime ago, back when she had more energy and less scars, back before the world shrunk to the building at work and the four walls of her house. Her best friend used to complain about how expensive town was, the drinks, the taxis, the shoes, and the skirts—they never could figure out why the shorter the skirt the more expensive it was—and back then life was pretty trivial.

Back then all changed five years ago when her world intersected with that of a man named Dwight Smith. The Dwight part of his name made him sound like a cowboy, like he should have been walking the streets wearing a ten-gallon hat and matching spurs to boot, like he should have been a do-gooding, all-round nice guy who’d say howdy, ma’am and sing sad songs. The Smith part made him sound like an Everyman, a last name like that could make him your doctor, your accountant, your neighbor. Or, in this case, it could also make him your rapist. She didn’t know his name before their worlds intersected. Had seen him a few times, an acknowledged nod or raised hand that came with being neighborly as they drove past each other, because that’s what he was—her neighbor.

Dwight had cut her. He’d cut her pretty bad. Cut her after he broke into her house, dragged her into the bedroom and cut her some more, then did some very unneighborly things to her. He had a hard-on for violence. That’s what one of the cops told her after Dwight was sent to jail.

So now it’s night and like every other night, and day too—let’s be honest here folks—she’s thinking about Dwight Smith. Her mind can’t switch off from it. Doing dishes, taking inventory at work, mowing her

lawn—Dwight Smith is always creep, creep, creeping around the corner of every thought. Tonight she's gotten caught late at work. One of the guys called in sick, and Jane just didn't show up, which was a typical thing for Jane these days, and the slack had to get taken up somewhere. It's just one of those things. That part has never changed no matter what the job. She used to work at the gym. She was a trainer. She had clients. They'd pay her and she'd torture them in the ways that would make them shed pounds and tighten flesh, and sometimes she'd have to work late there too.

After what she now considers "Dwight time," she didn't work for twelve months. She sat in her new home and she watched bad TV and ate bad food and instead of it making her fat it made her thin. Way too thin. Bad food isn't that bad when you're not eating much of it. It's just bad when it's all you're eating. Life, of course, moves on. It moves on at the exact same rate money runs out. She needed to get a job. What experience did she have? Well, there were two things she was good at—getting people fit and getting herself raped. She got a job in a supermarket, which involved neither of those things. She signs in deliveries and helps unpack them. In the summer the building is way too hot and in the winter it's way too cold, and it always smells of vegetables.

Her car is twenty yards away. Not far during the day. But pretty far when it's dark. There are lights flooding the parking lot, but still . . . there are plenty of shadows, the creep, creep, creeping shadows. She walks with her keys tight in her fist. She learned how to do a lot of damage with a car key in the self-defense classes she took once she started leaving the house again. Part of her always thinks about how empowering it'd be to kick the absolute shit out of somebody. Part of her knows that wouldn't happen, that she'd fall into a tight ball and let whatever was going to be done to her be done to her. C'est la vie. Isn't that what the French would say?

The twenty yards are eaten up quickly with long strides. Cowboy Dwight is nowhere in sight. And why the hell would he be? He's still in jail, hopefully getting done to him what was done to her. She wants him to rot in there. Wants him to die. Wants him to suffer. Every night she falls asleep breathing hatred for Dwight Smith and every morning she wakes breathing the same thing. She reaches her car and looks through the windows. It's paranoia, for sure, but paranoia has kept her world from intersecting with other Dwight Smiths. There is nobody inside.

The car is running low on gas. She hates getting gas. Hates the two or three minutes it takes to pump it, hates the small conversation with whoever comes out to help, hates the smell and the sense the whole place is one discarded cigarette away from becoming a fireball. But she gets gas and pays for it and doesn't get raped at the station or run off the road to be raped afterwards. She uses the remote to open her garage door. She drives in and watches in the mirror as the door closes behind her. Nobody rolls under it.

The lights are already on inside. She leaves them on during the day so she never has to come home to a dark house. She listens to the house for any kind of sound, but there's nothing. She strips off in the bathroom. She spends fifteen minutes in the shower. She dries herself down, puts on a robe, and opens the bathroom door to find Cowboy Dwight standing in her hallway.

Over the last few years she's seen Cowboy Dwight in the supermarket, at her sister's house, in the back of her car. Cowboy Dwight even made a brief appearance a few months ago playing the role of her optometrist. So this is nothing new. In fact her psychiatrist gave her something to make the visions disappear. Sometimes the pills work and sometimes they don't. She closes her eyes. All she has to do is count to five and Cowboy Dwight will be gone. He'll be back in jail serving his eleven years.

"You missed me?" he asks, and well now, this is new, because in the past the visions haven't spoken to her.

She'd always wondered what they would say if they did. She figured on a few things—perhaps I'm back to finish what I started, or I'm going to make you hurt. Throw some expletives in there, perhaps a line or two of how he was going to do this to her and that, how he'd make her scream but Really, really, you love it, don't you, bitch? First time he showed up after her attack she ran out of the room and called the police. They found nothing. They assured her Dwight was in jail. They checked the windows and doors, and then she made them check with the prison to make sure he was still there. The second time she called them again. The third time a psychiatrist got involved.

She closes her eyes. Breathes in. Breathes out. Eyes open and Cowboy Dwight is still there. He's wearing gray pants and a gray shirt with a red logo on it, and it takes her a few seconds to recognize it—it's the logo of the gas station she just came from. He's also chewing gum. In the other visions he was always wearing the same jeans he wore when he originally broke into her house. He wore a stupid black shirt with orange flames coming up from the bottom hem, like his waist was on fire. And he never chewed gum.

Her heart starts to race. Something in her mind is slowly bending, bending.

She closes her eyes again. "One."

"I bet you did miss me," he says, and she can smell her vision—the gas on his clothes and his chewing-gum breath.

"Two."

"Bet you've thought of nothing else over the last five years. Well, truth be told—"

"Three."

"I've thought of very little else too." His fingers touch the side of her face, he trails them down the scar, that god-awful scar he gave her, and hey Mr. Psychiatrist, now that the visions are talking and touching her, she'll need her prescription updated.

"Four."

"You felt good, Kelly. Really good. I used to think, well, I used to think if I had just gone ahead and stuck that knife deep between those beautiful tits of yours, you would never have been able to tell, and I would never have gotten caught."

"Five," she says, and she keeps her eyes closed.

"Jail makes a man regret things," he says. "Some regret the crimes. Most just regret getting caught. That's what I regret, Kelly. I regret getting caught."

"Five!" she says, this time louder. She opens her eyes. The pills haven't worked because Cowboy Dwight is still here. She can see the blackhead pimples down the sides of his nose. She can see the creases around his eyes. He has a couple of eyebrow hairs sticking out much further than the others, curling down towards his eye.

"Go to Hell," she says, and the confidence she didn't think she would have, the skills she learned in those self-defense classes, in a heartbeat they all come back to her. She takes one step back and pushes her weight

forward and swings her fist through the air.

Her vision of Dwight steps to the side. It swipes her punch off course with the back of its hand, then delivers one of its own. It gets her hard in the stomach. She staggers into the bathroom and into the side of the tub. She snatches at the shower curtain to balance herself, to stop from falling. It holds, it holds, then one of the plastic rings snaps. Then another, and they're snapping and flying around the room. She falls into the tub. Her head bounces into the wall but not hard enough to make the vision disappear and, unfortunately, not hard enough to knock her out. That means she's going to go along for the ride.

"Please," she says.

"This won't be like it was before," he tells her. "I mean, it'll start out the same. You're going to have to give me some of that good old-fashioned going-along-to-get-along cooperation, but it's going to end a whole lot different. Can't have you telling on me this time."

"Please," she says, and she's crying now. He leans down. He tugs at her robe and then it's gone and she's naked now, naked and exposed and vulnerable, too numb to fight back. Too scared. And why the hell can't she put up a fight, goddamn it? He drags her out of the tub and pushes her face down on the bathroom floor, right into a footstep puddle of water.

"Tell me you've missed me."

She can't answer him. Doesn't know what to say even if she could. He slaps her across the back of her thighs, hard, the sound echoing through the bathroom like a gunshot. Then he hits her again. She doesn't want to cry. He can take her body, he can end her life, but she's not going to give him any tears. It may not be much, but it's all she has. She. Will. Not. Cry.

She will. Be. Strong.

"Tell me," he says.

"No."

She hears his belt jingling and then his fly is being undone, and she won't survive it, not this time, and the truth is she doesn't even want to. C'est la vie. She closes her eyes and now the tears come. She sobs onto the tiles, the cold wet tiles that press against her, hoping her body can stay numb as the end comes.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anna Harlow:

Hey guys, do you desire to find a new book to see? May be the book with the concept Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series) suitable to you? The actual book was written by well known writer in this era. The actual book untitled Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series) is the main one of several books this everyone read now. This particular book was inspired many men and women in the world. When you read this e-book you will enter the new dimensions that you ever know ahead of. The author explained their thought in the simple way, so all of people can easily to recognise the core of this publication. This book will give you a large amount of information about this world now. So that

you can see the represented of the world in this particular book.

Maryann Carson:

Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series) can be one of your starter books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The article writer giving his/her effort to set every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series) however doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource information that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information may drawn you into brand new stage of crucial pondering.

Jesse Ward:

Within this era which is the greater man or who has ability to do something more are more valuable than other. Do you want to become one of it? It is just simple strategy to have that. What you must do is just spending your time very little but quite enough to get a look at some books. One of the books in the top list in your reading list is actually Five Minutes Alone: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series). This book which can be qualified as The Hungry Hills can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By looking upwards and review this reserve you can get many advantages.

Mark Adair:

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