



Pressure Head

J.L. Merrow

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Some secrets are better left hidden.

To most of the world, Tom Paretski is just a plumber with a cheeky attitude and a dodgy hip, souvenir of a schoolboy accident. The local police keep his number on file for a different reason—his sixth sense for finding hidden things.

When he's called in to help locate the body of a missing woman up on Nomansland Common, he unexpectedly encounters someone who resurrects a host of complicated emotions. Phil Morrison, Tom's old school crush, now a private investigator working the same case. And the former bully partly responsible for Tom's injury.

The shocks keep coming. Phil is now openly gay, and shows unmistakable signs of interest. Tom's attraction to the big, blond investigator hasn't changed—in fact, he's even more desirable all grown up. But is Phil's interest genuine, or does he only want to use Tom's talent?

As the pile of complicated evidence surrounding the woman's murder grows higher, so does the heat between Tom and Phil. But opening himself to this degree exposes Tom's heart in a way he's not sure he's ready for...while the murderer's trigger finger is getting increasingly twitchy.

Warning: *Contains a flirtatious plumber with hidden talents, a cashmere-clad private investigator with hidden depths, and an English village chock full of colourful characters with plenty to hide.*

Pressure Head Details

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From Reader Review Pressure Head for online ebook

DarienMoya says

~PH BALANCE!!!~

Firstly, let's start out by talking about that amazing cover. I just love it so much, it is just so light and fun just like the book. J.L Merrow is a master at making me laugh, and falling head over heels for her characters. She has taken a spot as one of my fave authors, my go to when I want a fun read with a side of hot loving.

Tom Paretski isn't your ordinary plumber he also has a talent for finding hidden things, stuff hidden out of guilt or hiding a dirty secret. The talent first made an appearance when he was a young boy and found the body of a little girl, not the most ideal experience for a young boy but it is a gift that comes in handy. So, when the cops can't find something they call in Tom. He finds himself searching for a missing woman and the outcome isn't a pleasant one. Now it seems his town has a got a killer on their hands, and to make things a little worse for him. He runs into his high school crush and bully. Phil is still as gorgeous as ever but seeing him, the past comes rearing its ugly head.

Now Phil has need of Tom's little finders' keepers' skill, and the men begin an investigation of their own. It's a surprise they got anything done, when they fight like cats and dogs, and constantly butt heads. Underneath all their bitching, the sexual tension was crackling and I kept thinking "*so when are you guys gonna get naked already?*"

Seriously, this book is a lot of fun. The murder-mystery was done well and kept me guessing up to the end. The highlight of the story is the town folks; I kept anticipating who would be next on Phil and Tom's list of suspects. The slow developing relationship between Phil and Tom was nice to read about, but I found myself getting frustrated with both their attitudes. I understood that they had old hurts to get pass, but man did they take their time >.<

Overall, I really liked it and enjoyed the variety in characters a lot. J.L has a gift in introducing new characters and having them play some part whether it is small or important, (that's no small feat). So yes, please do check this one out, lots of mystery (I kept it all mysterious), surprises, and most of all fun.

Ami says

3.5 stars

I rate the story slightly lower than few friends of mine for a purely personal reason. As an ESL, I grew up with American English (thanks to the TV shows and movies I watched). Other variety of English is a bit difficult for me to follow.

Unfortunately, this was the most *British* book from J.L. Merrow to-date, and I was having a difficult time to thoroughly enjoy it because I couldn't understand the lingo. It doesn't reflect the quality of the writing, in any way. I reduce ratings for mainstream books too, if I found it difficult to enjoy due to the British flair (case in point, my own review for Ben Aaronovitch's Rivers of London).

The book is more mystery than romance, in my perspective -- as Phil drags Tom along to find hidden secrets that people keep, in order to find out the real murderer of a woman, and saves the boyfriend from jail (who happens to be someone both Tom and Phil know from high school). They act on the attraction don't come until about last 1/5 of the book.

I like the mystery. I'm in the mood for one -- having struck with so-so romance -- and mystery thriller has always been my first love with books. I like the surrounding -- from the secretive vicar, to the abused wife, to Tom's best friends. They're all fun to read. Then of course, Tom himself, as the main narrator, is all around nice guy. His knack of a talent, to find hidden things is pretty awesome :).

I like Phil too, actually. I know that he comes like he's angry with Tom all the time, like he is resentful to what Tom has in life, but I also have a soft heart for grumpy characters.

The downside though (aside from the heavily English flair) is that I don't believe in their romance just yet. I feel that Phil still keeps a lot from Tom -- and the fact that the story is written with 1st person doesn't help. What about Phil's stance that feels bitter about marriage, for instance. Especially (view spoiler). It is not thoroughly explored.

I end up wondering about what Phil sees in Tom. Is it just because of the guilt? Or because of some nostalgic high-school memory? Because that couldn't be good for present relationship, could it?

So, while the mystery is good to follow, but the romance is not fully satisfying. For me, it will be okay if there's no promise-of-romance between the characters. But there is, and that part is the one that doesn't deliver.

Sofia says

This is complicated, when I started reading I was ready to start shooting from the hip but then I read on and stopped and thought and it is not so simple to 'judge'. Thank God that Merrow just gave me the story and did not try to tell me what to feel.

Yes this a 'simple' whodunit but the people this wraps around are not simple, rather complicated with all kinds of shades not just the grey ones.

I would like to read more about this cast, there is lots more to explore, delve into.

Julio Genao says

A bitter indictment of Britain's uniquely vicious history of homophobia and the inevitable results thereof—cunningly disguised as a cozy, cuttingly funny, hedgerow-piercing murder mystery with romantic m/m elements and a publican tour.

Also, two cats named Merlin and Arthur. Obviously.

The shame of the UK in this regard is well-documented—as is ours. But I find it especially poignant given the remarkable maturity and leftward-leanings of the current political milieu.

They're pretty good about this stuff—now. But not always. Not in time for Alan Turing.

So when I'm reading a book like this one, and I begin to notice that everything—nearly everything—hinges on the friction between the perception of homosexuality, and the reality—well, a boy takes notice.

Tom's hip was crushed by a car. On account of running away from an angry mob of schoolboys. Led by the school jock.

(view spoiler)

Which is some *majorly fucked-up shit to find*, innit, tucked between the lines of the sweet-natured Jessica Fletcher paperback you choose to read during your afternoon tea and biccies, is what I'm saying, here.

Even the title is a crafty double-entendre, referring both to Plumber Tom's dowsy, water-whisperer ESP and the force that builds up inside a person who discovers that they are born into a life—before they even have words for what they are—firmly athwart their family, their social circle, and their own desires.

Athwart the universe.

Like poor Merry. About the saddest creature you ever saw.

A priest. With fusty, 50s LGBT lit and some heartbreaking old letters in a shoebox under the bed, and—well, whatever—a gangbang fetish.

What happens to him is no accident; it's clearly of Merrow's ultimate design, and a good illustration of her point.

Which is then sneakily wrapped-up in a riotously funny light-romanze caper set in a country English village?

And that's another thing: it *is* pretty funny, you know, despite the grim bones of the thing.

So that is why I hereby raise a pint in Ms. Merrow's honor, for a job well-done, but also because:

Highly recommended.

Deeze says

I loved this book.

The characters were not only believable but fun.

Tom was a lovable little guy. He kept me chuckling with his thoughts and verbal responses.

Phil was more tricky to understand. He was frustrating at times and deserved a smack or two, but I did feel the chemistry between them even when Phil was being a right plonker. I would of liked a little more background on Phil, as I felt there was more to his life than we learned.

The murder mystery was intriguing and left me guessing till the end. The cast of characters were all entertaining and realistic not a know-it-all or prettily perfect dainty female amongst them.lol.

The focus on story and not sex was another win for me.

Another book to add to my favourite shelf. Although being a Britt and living near St. Albans I guess I could be a little bias lol.

ETA Just as much fun second time around. I really love Tom and Phil

ETA Still a funny read, with plenty of intrigue. One of the best bits for me is that these guys are not picture perfect. They have flaws and in Toms case short comings lol.

~Mindy Lynn~ says

When Tom is called upon to help find the body of a missing girl he runs into an old high school crush who is also his high school bully, Phil Morrison. Tom is surprised by the sudden blast from his not too fond past, but then absolutely shocked when he is told that Phil is now openly gay. The reunion of the two old high school classmates is not a friendly one and Tom can't wait to find this girl and escape from Phil. But Phil is a private investigator and has been hired by the missing girl's family to find out what has happened to her, so Tom doesn't exactly escape him...

Pressure Head was a lot of fun to read. I loved Tom. He's smart, funny, charming, a flirt, and sarcastic. He's my kind of guy. I loved that he was a normal guy with a normal job of a, Plumber. I love a good mystery and I love them even more when they involve psychics, ghosts, and in this case, Tom's special gift of being a finder.

I really like Phil as well. He is guilt stricken over the things he did to Tom is school. Especially over the accident that involved Tom being hit by a car. Eventually him and Tom start working together and lines get crossed and a relationship blossoms. I loved that even though they obviously have feelings for each other it isn't rushed. It's not insta love. The relationship develops in a pace that I appreciated.

The mystery was light and not too heavy. There was quite a bit of odd characters that made some excellent suspects. The reverend was a special kind of creepy. I loved Gary and Darren though and Tom's cats. If you're looking for a light mystery with a great cast of characters then this is a read for you.

Mandapanda says

Great mystery from one of my favourite authors. Pressure Head is narrated by Tom Paretski, plumber extraordinaire, charmer of old ladies, and high school bully survivor, who has a weird ability to find things (and people) who are lost. He's called in by the local police to find the body of a young woman. Also at the scene is his past tormentor (Phil), now a PI, who has been hired by the girl's parents to help find the killer. Phil persuades Tom to use his ability to help him solve the case.

Tom's narration is a pleasure to read. Cheeky and vulnerable in turns. He makes a great amateur detective and was totally believable as he gets sucked into the lives and dramas of the suspects. Phil is much less likeable. He stays fairly distant and angry throughout the story. Never really able to get over the guilt for his part in Tom's childhood abuse, and to me he actually seemed to resent Tom for his happiness and ability to get on with life. There is some sexual tension there and I wanted them to get together (which they finally do at about 80%) but the ending leaves a lot of their relationship unresolved.

This story would have to have the most British flavour of all her books. Slang, quaint characters, and corner pubs abound. The mystery also has a definite British flair. I could have been watching a slightly edgier version of Midsomer Murders. I would absolutely LOVE a sequel or series with these characters. Something like Kaje Harper's Life Lessons series or Haley Walsh's Skylar Foxe series. Surely the author can't leave Tom and Phil as they are now? It felt unsatisfying and all I can say is, **I want MORE!**

Lenore says

I want a plumber like Tom Paretski. The ones I've dealt with so far were either trying to rip me off or grope my ass. Or both. And they never call me 'love.'

I want a PI like Phil Morrison. Because he's got class, he knows how to dress, and he cares about his clients. He's not half bad to look at, either.

And I need to read more of J.L. Merrow's work. Few other m/m authors manage to have such irresistible narrating characters without sacrificing the story or the plot or the side characters.

Recommended.

Macky says

What a little gem. This was a fresh, funny mystery romance that was an absolute pleasure to read. The story is narrated by Tom Paretski, gay plumber and sometime police "consultant" in so much as he has always had a gift for 'finding' lost things, in this case he is asked by his policeman friend Dave to help find a missing girl. Tom finds her dead body and whilst at the scene is confronted by a blast from his past in the

person of his nemesis from his schooldays - Phil Morrison, tall, blonde and gorgeous, now turned Private investigator hired by the girls parents to help find her. Phil and his homophobic friends had tormented Tom as a teenager so there is no love lost between them. Even though Phil treated him badly, Tom had always had a bit of a crush on him so its a revelation to Tom to find out that Phil is now out and proud and apparently a changed man. It turns out that they have a mutual friend involved in the case who was engaged to the girl and of course is now a suspect, so Phil, not really believing in Toms gift but thinking he knows more than he's saying, asks Tom to help him exonerate their friend. And so starts a clever, witty murder mystery with a set of memorable, extremely likeable characters and tons of style!

Toms narrative was really funny - full of witty repartee and snarky banter - and when he and Phil are together you can feel the tension and attraction that they are both afraid to act on. The best thing about this story is the fact that they don't act on the attraction until the end of the book so there is very little in the love scene department but this is still a sexy, sensual love story, because the slow build up causes the type of ST that sizzles so that when it finally happens its awesome and hot. What a great change to have a m/m romance that isn't fuelled by mind numbing explicit in your face sex! The mystery in itself is filled with loads of red herrings and quirky suspects and will keep you guessing right till the end. Toms friend Gary and his boyfriend Darren - a truly inspired creation - had me in tucks. Read it and you'll see why. Genius! Tom is an absolute sweetie and a real charmer and Phil may come over as the strong silent type but you just can't help falling for both of them and rooting for them to get their HEA.

This really is a fabulous read, I can't Reccomend it enough. I hope J I Merrow gives Tom and Phil and the gang a series or at least a follow up because there is definitely more mileage in these fantastic characters. Do not pass this one by.

Natasha says

Wow. So good.

This book is so fun. I mean, really, really fun.

And fast-paced. J.L. Merrow has a huge fan in Natasha Snow, that's for sure.

This is the old enemies to lovers trope, which I **love**, and it's done so tastefully well. She avoids a lot of other tropes in her writing, straying from relationship norms that I find in a lot of M/M romance novels.

I love Tom. I love that he's not your typical gorgeous character in romance novels (although he is gorgeous). I think it's quite hilarious that he's always kind of dirty, doesn't seem to do laundry, and has a blue collar job. I find it refreshing. Plus, he's absolutely hilarious.

And who couldn't love Phil? Tall, dark, and handsome. And grumpy, of course. Mustn't forget the grumpy.

The relationship between these two characters is so snarky, it's hilarious. I loved when they were starting to "work" together and always seemed to bicker. It's like they were almost friends, but still had so much unsettled air between them.

And god, there is so much sexual tension in this book. I love that Merrow made me wait. Like, *really* wait for it.

Would rec. Super find. Weeeeeee!

Emma Sea says

[L word, and no final sex scene (hide spoiler)]

Kat ? says

[YES. (hide spoiler)]

Baba says

"Course, you might get on all right with him. He's one of your lot, not that you'd know it to look at him."
"What a plumber?" I asked innocently.
"Piss off. And he's not a bloody psychic either. He's queer, all right? And if I catch you two canoodling on police time, I'm taking pictures and bunging them on the Internet."
"I'll try and control my raging homo desires," I said as dryly as I could.

After reading and loving *Muscling Through* I was looking forward to another very good story written by the talented J.L. Merrow. As it was, she did not disappoint at all. Then again, I find it quite interesting that both books struggle with the same shortcomings—at least from my point of view.

Overall it was a real pleasure to read *Pressure Head*. I totally dig the author's excellent writing, her sense of humor and the Britishism. Her characters are quite unique and Tom is so priceless and well-drawn. He made me smile time and again. The guy is a bit snarky which made him all the more multilayered as well as endearing to me. Furthermore, the plot is well-developed, the dialogue is witty and hilarious and the writing is very enthralling.

(...) "You should put it on your business cards--Tom Paretski, the pocket-sized plumber. No job too small."
"And again with the height jokes. What do you have on yours? Phil Morrison, the muscle-bound moron?"
"Now, come on--that's a poor effort. How about Private Dick--the biggest in the business?"
I grinned. "So is it, then?"
His turn to say, "What?"
"The biggest. Come to that, is it private, or can anyone apply?" I took another forkful of plaiice.
(...)
"They can apply," he said at last. "Doesn't mean they'll get the job."

What did not work for me, though, was the lack of chemistry and build-up. The sex scene is way better than in *Muscling Through*, however, I've had a hard time to imagine these two guys together, as in having a

loving relationship. In fact, I felt that there was a lack of "relationship development". While the story mainly revolves around the murder mystery these two guys were so not tuned to the same wavelength. I have to wonder if I am the only one who didn't "feel" it. Bitching at one another is all right as long as it doesn't kill the chemistry. And boy, did they bitch from the get-go. Furthermore, I would have liked to get to know Phil a bit better. Even at the end of the story, he remained a mystery to me--sort of. I really can't claim to know him but on the other hand, he is a great hunk, definitely delicious and a sight for sore eyes.

Despite my minor issues *Pressure Head* is a very worthwhile and entertaining read. If you are a fellow m-m lover and you haven't read anything by J.L. Merrow, then it's time to give her a try. Enjoy!

Cole Riann says

Review posted at The Armchair Reader.

4.25 stars

Yay for another novel by JL Merrow!!! She's one of my favorite authors, and as I told a friend recently, I'm almost nervous when I start reading each successively published novel because I've loved them all so much there's bound to be one that disappoints me. Thankfully, that wasn't the case here and I ended really really thoroughly enjoying this latest offering by a really wonderful author.

Tom Paretski is a plumber with a secret -- he's got a knack for finding things. It's a bit like dowsing, he can hone in on hidden things, things that have deep emotion attached to them like guilt or shame. Sadly, lost and hidden things include people, and we meet him as his friend on the force Dave, calls him in to look for a local missing woman. Tom's in for more shock than seeing another dead body, however, when a ghost from his past shows up at the scene as a private investigator hired by the family of the murdered victim.

The last time Tom saw Phil Morrison was when he and his cronies stepped up their high school bullying a bit too far. Tom still lives with the scars of that physical and emotional trauma and seeing the man ten years later dredges all those feelings back up. It doesn't help that he's just as attracted to the man as he was back then and it certainly pisses him off that the man is apparently as big of a homo as he is, and completely out of the closet. Phil has an attitude as well, one that might rival Tom's perpetual snark and their verbal blows start almost immediately. Phil doesn't believe in his gift, but he needs Tom's help anyway. They both have vested interest in making sure the current suspect gets treated fairly and together, they might be able to get the answers they need to find the real killer.

Merrow has a knack for slyly mixing genres that really works for me. This story is for all intents and purposes a contemporary mystery romance, with the exception of Tom's gift. That is perhaps the reason Tom's gift isn't given center stage. Though we first get to know him through his gift, it's often presented as rather unglamorous and second rate to pounding pavement detective work. We get to know Tom as if the gift is just a quirky peccadillo that comes in handy during his plumbing work. Though it does get used, and is central to the plot, the different focus and misdirection worked well to show Tom as an ordinary guy who is rather in over his head in this whole mess.

I really liked Tom. He's a strong character that has a real moral compass amid the corrupt characters that stock the story. In a way, he's retained his innocence beneath his jaded veneer, which contrasts nicely with

Phil, who harbors rather a lot of guilt and shame over his past. I appreciated that they both came across as assholes every once and a while, trying to work through their shared history (or at times ignore it).

The mystery worked well for me, though hardcore mystery fans might find the story lighter than they're used to. Much of the story is focused on detective work, but a lot of the focus is on the relationship between Tom and Phil in the midst of it. I was a little disappointed that we didn't hear what happens to a character that showed up early in the story that I felt rather sorry for, and of course, I could have really done with more of the smexxin from these two because they are sizzling together!

So, once again, I loved this offering from one of my favorite authors and as always look forward to whatever she publishes. This one is definitely recommended.

Argona says

This book was my first read in 2016 and I have to say that I had a really great time reading it! I am a huge fan of stories that combine crime solving with romance and this one hit all the right buttons, considering the story also contained enemies-turned-lovers theme which is one my most favorite themes and had a paranormal aspect. I also really like characters that suffer from certain disabilities or characters that are all grumpy on the outside and soft in the inside. Keep in mind that this is one of those stories that the crime and mystery elements are much stronger than the romance. Most of the story took place when the main characters were interviewing different suspects and witnesses, so you have to actually like this kind of story to begin with.

This isn't a simple story. It actually explores very dark themes regarding homosexuality that are sadly a reality in many parts of the world. This story has a medium as the main character and yet I found it realistic enough. "Pressure Head" was very funny story yet had very dark undertones hidden in the depth. Even the title has several meanings and isn't what it seems at the surface. So yes, I found the story very well-written and the mystery was well-crafted. It wasn't annoyingly obvious and there were many red herrings. I really liked the British setting of the story, although as a person only familiar with American English, I had trouble understanding some of the British phrases.

I liked all the characters and none them was stupid or annoying. I couldn't help but sympathize with most of the characters and I loved both main characters. I think Tom and Phil had a lot of chemistry and I enjoyed every scene that included both of them. Tom was sometimes a little judgy but a human character is supposed to have flaws and I liked how he would change his opinion after actually getting to know people. I also liked how Phil was less approachable than Tom despite his line of work and Tom's friendly manner was both nice and believable. Tom's dark and witty sense of humor was just hilarious! Movies and books hardly make me laugh and yet this book managed to make me laugh really hard several times! The sarcastic and witty bickering between the boys was really fun and the two cats named Merlin and Arthur were just icing on cake.

I would have liked more time invested in the romantic relationship between the main characters. There was a lot of delicious sexual tension and a childhood bully becoming a lover is a very tricky theme and I wasn't really surprised at the lack of intimacy. After all, the main characters have a very painful history with obstacles that are not easy to overcome. I found it realistic that the two of them couldn't put all the bitterness and resentment behind and would lash out at each other every once in a while. Certain wounds never heal and even a small poke can have devastating results.

Which is why I was disappointed that their relationship wasn't explored deep enough. I simply wanted to know more about their inner feelings, especially many questions regarding Phil's true feelings weren't answered and his love for Tom or the depth of it, wasn't really explored and his character needed a lot more poking. Then again this is the first book in a series and I think the author has left certain developments for the next books.

Overall, "Pressure Head" was a very enjoyable read. I stayed up till 3 am to finish this book so I can't give it anything less than 5 stars. I highly recommend it, if you like all the themes and elements I mentioned at the beginning of my review.
