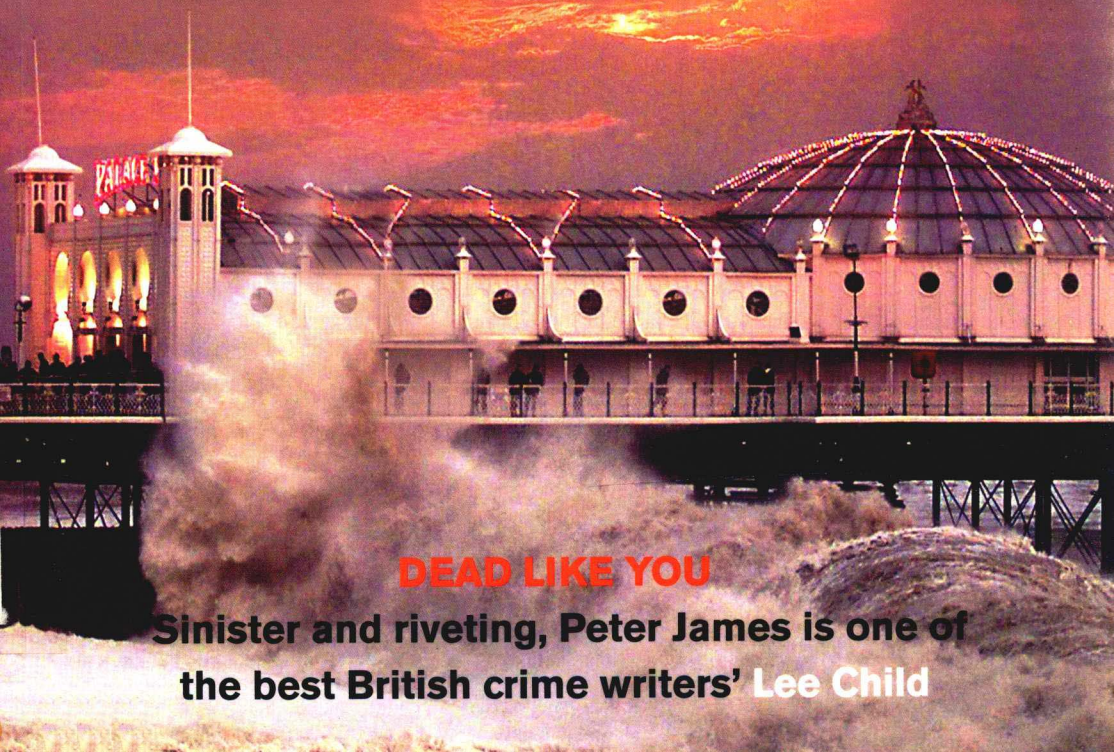


THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER

PETER JAMES

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

ONE MISTAKE
TWO MURDERS
NO REMORSE



DEAD LIKE YOU

Sinister and riveting, Peter James is one of
the best British crime writers' Lee Child

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

PETER JAMES



MACMILLAN



First published 2011 by Macmillan
an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-0-230-74725-8 HB
ISBN 978-0-230-74724-1 TPB

Copyright © Really Scary Books / Peter James 2011

The right of Peter James to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or
transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written
permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized
act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal
prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The Macmillan Group has no responsibility for the information provided by
any author websites whose address you obtain from this book ('author websites').
The inclusion of author website addresses in this book does not constitute
an endorsement by or association with us of such sites or the content,
products, advertising or other materials presented on such sites.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

Typeset by SetSystems Limited, Saffron Walden, Essex
Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out,
or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which
it is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Visit www.panmacmillan.com to read more about all our books
and to buy them. You will also find features, author interviews and
news of any author events, and you can sign up for e-newsletters
so that you're always first to hear about our new releases.

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

Also by Peter James

DEAD LETTER DROP

ATOM BOMB ANGEL

BILLIONAIRE

POSSESSION

DREAMER

SWEET HEART

TWILIGHT

PROPHECY

ALCHEMIST

HOST

THE TRUTH

DENIAL

FAITH

Children's Novel

GETTING WIRED!

The Roy Grace Series

DEAD SIMPLE

LOOKING GOOD DEAD

NOT DEAD ENOUGH

DEAD MAN'S FOOTSTEPS

DEAD TOMORROW

DEAD LIKE YOU

TO EVA KLAESSON-LINDEBLAD

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

1

On the morning of the accident, Carly had forgotten to set the alarm and overslept. She woke with a bad hangover, a damp dog crushing her and the demented pounding of drums and cymbals coming from her son's bedroom. To add to her gloom, it was pelting with rain outside.

She lay still for a moment, gathering her thoughts. She had a chiropody appointment for a painful corn and a client she loathed would be in her office in just over two hours. It was going to be one of those days, she had the feeling, when things just kept on getting worse. Like the drumming.

'Tyler!' she yelled. 'For Christ's sake, stop that. Are you ready?'

Otis leapt off the bed and began barking furiously at his reflection in the mirror on the wall.

The drumming fell silent.

She staggered to the bathroom, found the paracetamols and gulped two down. I am so not a good example to my son, she thought. I'm not even a good example to my dog.

As if on cue, Otis padded into the bathroom, holding his lead in his mouth expectantly.

'What's for breakfast, Mum?' Tyler called out.

She stared at herself in the bathroom mirror. Mercifully, most of her forty-one-year-old – and this morning going on 241-year-old – face was shrouded in a tangle of blonde hair that looked, at this moment, like matted straw.

'Arsenic!' she shouted back, her throat raw from too many cigarettes last night. 'Laced with cyanide and rat poison.'

Otis stamped his paw on the bathroom tiles.

'Sorry, no walkies. Not this morning. Later. OK?'

'I had that yesterday!' Tyler shouted back.

'Well, it didn't sodding work, did it?'

She switched on the shower, waited for it to warm up, then stepped inside.

2

Stuart Ferguson, in jeans, Totectors boots and company overalls on top of his uniform polo shirt, sat high up in his cab, waiting impatiently for the lights to change. The wipers clunked away the rain. Rush-hour traffic sluiced across Brighton's Old Shoreham Road below him. The engine of his sixteen-wheel, twenty-four-ton Volvo fridge-box artic chuntered away, a steady stream of warm air toasting his legs. April already, but winter had still not relaxed its grip, and he'd driven through snow at the start of his journey. No one was going to sell him global warming.

He yawned, staring blearily at the vile morning, then took a long swig of Red Bull. He put the can into the cup-holder, ran his clammy, meaty hands across his shaven head, then drummed them on the steering wheel to the beat of 'Bat Out of Hell', which was playing loud enough to wake the dead fish behind him. It was the fifth or maybe the sixth can he had drunk in the past few hours and he was shaking from the caffeine overdose. But that and the music were the only things that were keeping him awake right now.

He had started his journey yesterday afternoon and driven through the night from Aberdeen, in Scotland. There were 603 miles on the clock so far. He'd been on the road for eighteen hours, with barely a break other than a stop for food at Newport Pagnell Services and a brief kip in a lay-by a couple of hours earlier. If it hadn't been for an accident at the M1/M6 interchange, he'd have been here an hour ago, at 8 a.m. as scheduled.

But saying *if it hadn't been for an accident* was pointless. There were always accidents, all the time. Too many people on the roads, too many cars, too many lorries, too many idiots, too many distractions, too many people in a hurry. He'd seen it all over the years. But he was proud of his record. Nineteen years and not one scrape – or even a ticket.

As he glanced routinely at the dashboard, checking the oil

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

pressure, then the temperature gauge, the traffic lights changed. He rammed the gear lever of the four-over-four splitter box forward and steadily picked up speed as he crossed the junction into Carlton Terrace, then headed down the hill towards the sea, which was under a mile away. After an earlier stop at Springs, the salmon smokery a few miles north in the Sussex Downs, he now had one final delivery to make to offload his cargo. It was to the Tesco supermarket in the Holmbush Centre on the outskirts of the city. Then he would drive to the port of Newhaven, load up with frozen New Zealand lamb, snatch a few hours' sleep on the quay and head back up to Scotland.

To Jessie.

He was missing her a lot. He glanced down at her photograph on the dashboard, next to the pictures of his two kids, Donal and Logan. He missed them badly, too. His bitch ex-wife, Maddie, was giving him a hard time over contact. But at least sweet Jessie was helping him get his life back together.

She was four months pregnant with their child. Finally, after three hellish years, he had a future to focus on again, instead of just a past full of bitterness and recrimination.

Ordinarily on this run he would have taken a few hours out to get some proper kip – and comply with the law on driver hours. But the refrigeration was on the blink, with the temperature rising steadily, and he couldn't take the risk of ruining the valuable cargo of scallops, shrimps, prawns and salmon. So he just had to keep going.

So long as he was careful, he would be fine. He knew where the vehicle check locations were, and by listening to CB radio he'd get warned of any active ones. That was why he was detouring through the city now, rather than taking the main road around it.

Then he cursed.

Ahead of him he could see red flashing lights, then barriers descending. The level crossing at Portslade Station. Brake lights came on one by one as the vehicles in front slowed to a halt. With a sharp hiss of his brakes, he pulled up, too. On his left he saw a fair-haired man bowed against the rain, his hair batted by the wind, unlocking the front door of an estate agency called Rand & Co.

PETER JAMES

He wondered what it would be like to have that sort of job. To be able to get up in the morning, go to an office and then come home in the evening to your family, rather than spend endless days and nights driving, alone, eating in service station cafés or munching a burger in front of the crappy telly in the back of his cab. Maybe he would still be married if he had a job like that. Still see his kids every night and every weekend.

Except, he knew, he'd never be content if he was stuck in one place. He liked the freedom of the road. Needed it. He wondered if the guy turning the lock of the estate agency door had ever looked at a rig like his and thought to himself, I wish I was twisting the ignition key of one of those instead.

Other pastures always looked greener. The one certainty he'd learned in life was that no matter who you were or what you did, shit happened. And one day you would tread in it.

3

Tony nicknamed her Santa because the first time they made love, that snowy December afternoon in his parents' house in the Hamp-tons, Suzy had been wearing dark red satin underwear. He told her that all his Christmases had come at once.

She, grinning, gave him the cheesy reply that she was glad that was the only thing that had come at once.

They had been smitten with each other since that day. So much so that Tony Revere had abandoned his plans to study for a business degree at Harvard and instead had followed her from New York to England, much to the dismay of his control-freak mother, and joined her at the University of Brighton.

'Lazybones!' he said. 'You goddamn lazybones.'

'So, I don't have any lectures today, OK?'

'It's half eight, right?'

'Yep, I know. I heard you at eight o'clock. Then eight fifteen. Then eight twenty-five. I need my beauty sleep.'

He looked down at her and said, 'You're beautiful enough. And you know what? We haven't made love since midnight.'

'Are you going off me?'

'I guess.'

'I'll have to get the old black book out.'

'Oh yeah?'

She raised a hand and gripped him, firmly but gently, below his belt buckle, then grinned as he gasped. 'Come back to bed.'

'I have to see my tutor, then I have a lecture.'

'On what?'

'Galbraithian challenges in today's workforce.'

'Wow. Lucky you.'

'Yeah. Faced with that or a morning in bed with you, it's a no-brainer.'

'Good. Come back to bed.'

PETER JAMES

'I am so not coming back to bed. You know what's going to happen if I don't get good grades this semester?'

'Back to the States to Mummy.'

'You know my mom.'

'Uh huh, I do. Scary lady.'

'You said it.'

'So, you're afraid of her?'

'Everyone's afraid of my mom.'

Suzy sat up a little and scooped some of her long dark hair back. 'More afraid of her than you are of me? Is that the real reason why you came here? I'm just the excuse for you to escape from her?'

He leaned down and kissed her, tasted her sleepy breath and inhaled it deeply, loving it. 'You're gorgeous, did I tell you that?'

'About a thousand times. You're gorgeous, too. Did I tell you that?'

'About ten thousand times. You're like a record that got stuck in a groove,' he said, hitching the straps of his lightweight rucksack over his shoulders.

She looked at him. He was tall and lean, his short dark hair gelled in uneven spikes, with several days' growth of stubble, which she liked to feel against her face. He was dressed in a padded anorak over two layers of T-shirt, jeans and trainers, and smelled of the Abercrombie & Fitch cologne she really liked.

There was an air of confidence about him that had captivated her the first time they had spoken, down in the dark basement bar of Pravda, in Greenwich Village, when she'd been in New York on holiday with her best friend, Katie. Poor Katie had ended up flying back to England on her own, while she had stayed on with Tony.

'When will you be back?' she said.

'As soon as I can.'

'That's not soon enough!'

He kissed her again. 'I love you. I adore you.'

She windmilled her hands. 'More.'

'You're the most stunning, beautiful, lovely creature on the planet.'

'More!'

'Every second I'm away from you, I miss you so much it hurts.'

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

She windmilled her hands again. 'More!'

'Now you're being greedy.'

'You make me greedy.'

'And you make me horny as hell. I'm going before I have to do something about it!'

'You're really going to leave me like this?'

'Yep.'

He kissed her again, tugged a baseball cap on to his head, then wheeled his mountain bike out of the apartment, down the stairs, through the front door and into the cold, blustery April morning. As he closed the front door behind him, he breathed in the salty tang of the Brighton sea air, then looked at his watch.

Shit.

He was due to see his tutor in twenty minutes. If he pedalled like hell, he might just make it.

4

Click. Beeehhh ... gleep ... uhuhuhurrr ... gleep ... grawwwwp ... biff, heh, heh, heh. warrup, haha ...

'That noise is driving me nuts,' Carly said.

Tyler, in the passenger seat of her Audi convertible, was bent over his iPhone playing some bloody game he was hooked on called Angry Birds. Why did everything he did involve noise?

The phone now emitted a sound like crashing glass.

'We're late,' he said, without looking up and without stopping playing.

Twang-greep-heh, heh, heh ...

'Tyler, please. I have a headache.'

'So?' He grinned. 'You shouldn't have got pissed last night. Again.'

She winced at his use of adult language.

Twang ... heh, heh, heh, grawwwpppp ...

In a moment she was going to grab the sodding phone and throw it out of the window.

'Yep, well, you'd have got *pissed* last night, too, if you'd had to put up with that prat.'

'Serves you right for going on blind dates.'

'Thanks.'

'You're welcome. I'm late for school. I'm going to get stick for that.' He was still peering intently through his oval wire-framed glasses.

Click-click-beep-beep-beep.

'I'll phone and tell them,' she offered.

'You're always phoning and telling them. You're irresponsible. Maybe I should get taken into care.'

'I've been begging them to take you, for years.'

She stared through the windscreen at the red light and the steady stream of traffic crossing in front of them, and then at the

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

clock: 8.56 a.m. With luck, she'd drop him off at school and get to her chiropody appointment on time. Great, a double-pain morning! First the corn removal, then her client, Mr Misery. No wonder his wife had left him. Carly reckoned she'd probably have topped herself if she'd been married to him. But hey, she wasn't paid to sit in judgement. She was paid to stop Mrs Misery from walking off with both of her husband's testicles, as well as everything else of his – correction, *theirs* – that she was after.

'It really hurts, still, Mum.'

'What does? Oh, right, your brace.'

Tyler touched the front of his mouth. 'It's too tight.'

'I'll call the orthodontist and get you an appointment with him.'

Tyler nodded and focused back on his game.

The lights changed. She moved her right foot from the brake pedal and accelerated. The news was coming up and she leaned forward, turning up the radio.

'I'm going to the *old people* this weekend, right?'

'I'd rather you didn't call them that, OK? They're your *grand-parents*.'

A couple of times a year Tyler spent a day with her late husband's parents. They doted on him, but he found them deadly dull.

Tyler shrugged. 'Do I have to go?'

'Yes, you have to go.'

'Why?'

'It's called *servicing the will*.'

He frowned. 'What?'

She grinned. 'Just a joke – don't repeat that.'

'Servicing the will?' he echoed.

'Forget I said it. Bad taste. I'll miss you.'

'You're a lousy liar. You might say that with more feeling.' He studiously drew his finger across the iPhone screen, then lifted it.

Twang . . . eeeeeekkkk . . . greeeeep . . . heh, heh, heh . . .

She caught the next lights and swung right into New Church Road, cutting across the front of a skip lorry, which blared its horn at her.

'You trying to get us killed or something?' Tyler said.

'Not us, just you.' She grinned.

‘There are agencies to protect children from parents like you,’ he said.

She reached out her left arm and ran her fingers through his tousled brown hair.

He jerked his head away. ‘Hey, don’t mess it up!’

She glanced fondly at him for an instant. He was growing up fast and looked handsome in his shirt and tie, red blazer and grey trousers. Not quite thirteen years old and girls were already chasing him. He was growing more like his late father every day, and there were some expressions he had which reminded her of Kes too much, and in unguarded moments that could make her tearful, even five years on.

Moments later, at a few minutes past nine, she pulled up outside the red gates of St Christopher’s School. Tyler clicked off his seat belt and reached behind him to pick up his rucksack.

‘Is Friend Mapper on?’

He gave her a ‘duh’ look. ‘Yes, it’s on. I’m not a baby, you know.’

Friend Mapper was a GPS app on the iPhone that enabled her to track exactly where he was at any moment on her own iPhone.

‘So long as I pay your bill, you keep it on. That’s the deal.’

‘You’re overprotective. I might turn out to be emotionally retarded.’

‘That’s a risk I’ll have to take.’

He climbed out of the car into the rain, then held the door hesitantly. ‘You should get a life.’

‘I had one before you were born.’

He smiled before slamming the door.

She watched him walk in through the gates into the empty play area – all the other pupils had already gone inside. Every time he went out of her sight, she was scared for him. Worried about him. The only reassurance that he was OK was when she checked her own iPhone and watched his pulsing purple dot and could see where he was. Tyler was right, she was overprotective, but she couldn’t help it. She loved him desperately and, despite some of his maddening attitudes and behaviour, she knew that he loved her back, just as much.

She headed up towards Portland Road, driving faster than she