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AN
INSPECTOR
BANKS
MYSTERY

PETER ROBINSON

IN A
DRY SEASON

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藏书章

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DRY SEASON

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IN A DRY SEASON

Peter Robinson grew up in Leeds, Yorkshire. He emigrated to Canada in 1974 and attended York University and the University of Windsor, where he was later Writer in Residence. He received the Arthur Ellis Award in 1992 for *Past Reason Hated* and in 1997 for *Innocent Graves*, and was shortlisted for the John Creasey Award in Britain for his first Inspector Banks mystery, *Gallows View*. *Past Reason Hated* also won the 1994 TORONTO Talking Book of the Year Award, and *Wednesday's Child* was nominated for an Edgar Award. Five additional Inspector Banks novels have all been published to critical acclaim. Peter Robinson is also the author of the psychological thriller *Caedmon's Song* and the LAPD procedural *No Cure for Love*. He lives in Toronto.

Other Inspector Banks mysteries published by Penguin:

Gallows View
A Dedicated Man
A Necessary End
The Hanging Valley
Past Reason Hated
Wednesday's Child
Final Account
Innocent Graves
Dead Right

Also by Peter Robinson:

Caedmon's Song
No Cure for Love

For Dad and Averil
Elaine and Mick
and Adam and Nicola

“The past is a foreign country;
they do things differently there.”

L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

**IN A
DRY SEASON**

Prologue: August 1967

It was the Summer of Love and I had just buried my husband when I first went back to see the reservoir that had flooded my childhood village.

I made the journey only a few months after Ronald and I had returned from one of our frequent long spells abroad. Spells that had suited me well for many years. Ronald, too, had suited me well. He was a decent man and a good husband, quite willing to accept that our marriage was one of convenience. I believe he saw me as an asset in his diplomatic career, though it was certainly neither my dazzling beauty nor my sparkling wit that snared him. I was, however, presentable and intelligent, in addition to being an exceptionally good dancer.

Whatever the reason, I became adept at playing the minor diplomat's wife. It seemed a small price to pay. In a way, I was Ronald's passport to career success and promotion, and—though I never told him this—he was my passport to flight and escape. I married him because I knew we would spend our lives far away from England, and I wanted to be as far away from England as possible. Now, after more than ten years abroad, it doesn't seem to matter very much. I shall be quite content to live out the rest of my days in the Belsize Park flat. Ronald, always a shrewd investor, also left me a tidy sum of money. Enough, at least, to live

on for some years and to buy myself a new Triumph sports car. A red one. With a radio.

And so, singing along with "All You Need is Love," "Itchycoo Park" and "See Emily Play," listening to the occasional news bulletins about Joe Orton's murder and the closing-down of the off-shore pirate radio stations, I headed back to Hobb's End for the first time in more than twenty years. For some reason I have never been able to explain, I enjoyed the raw, naïve and whimsical new music the young people were listening to, even though I was in my early forties. It made me long to be young again: young without the complications of my own youth; young without the war; young without the heartbreak; young without the terror and the blood.

I don't think I saw another car after I left the main road outside Skipton. It was one of those perfect summer days when the air smells sweet with the perfume of cut grass and wild flowers. I fancied I could even smell the warm exhalations of the drystone walls. Berries shone like polished garnets on the rowan trees. Tewits soared and tumbled over the meadows and sheep bleated their pitiful calls from the far dalesides. The colours were all so vibrant, the green greener than ever, the blue of the cloudless sky piercingly bright.

Not far beyond Grassington I lost my way. I stopped and asked two men carrying out repairs to a drystone wall. It was a long time since I had heard the characteristic broad speech of the Dales and at first it sounded foreign to me. Finally I understood, thanked them and left them scratching their heads over the strange middle-aged lady with the sunglasses, the pop music and the flashy red sports car.

The old lane stopped at the edge of the woods, so I had to get out and walk the rest of the way along a crooked dirt path. Clouds of gnats whined above my head, wrens flitted through

the undergrowth and blue tits hopped from branch to branch.

At last I broke out of the woods and stood at the edge of the reservoir. My heart pulsed into my throat and I had to lean against one of the trees. The bark felt rough on my palms. For a moment, skin flushed and fingers tingling, I thought I was going to faint. But it passed.

There had been trees long ago, of course, but not as many, and most of them had been to the north of the village, in Rowan Woods. When I had lived there, Hobb's End had been a village in a valley. Now I gazed upon a lake surrounded by forest.

The water's surface, utterly still, reflected the trees and the occasional shadow of a gull or a swallow flying over. To my right, I could see the small dam where the old river narrowed as it flowed into Harksmere Reservoir. Confused, unsure what I was feeling, I sat on the bank and stared over the scene.

I was sitting where the old railway branch line used to run, the train I had travelled on so often during my childhood. A single track that ran to and from Harrogate, the railway had provided our only real access to the larger world beyond Hobb's End during the war. Dr Beeching had done away with it three or four years ago, of course, and already the lines were overgrown with weeds. The council had planted weeping willows on the spot where the old station had stood, where many a time I had bought tickets from Mrs Shipley and waited on the platform with rising excitement to hear the distant chugging and whistling of the old steam engine.

As I sat there remembering, time went by. I had started out late and the journey from London was a long one. Soon, darkness infused the woods around me, filling the spaces between the branches and the silences between the bird-calls. A whisper of a breeze sprang up. The water caught the fading light in such a way that its slightly ruffled surface looked as if it had been

sprinkled with salmon-pink powder. Slowly, even this darkened, until only a deep inky blue remained.

Then a full moon rose, scattering its bone-white light, in which I fancied I could see clear through the water to the village that used to be there, like an image preserved in water-glass. There it was, spread out below me, darkly glittering and shimmering under the barely perceptible rippling of the surface.

As I stared, I began to feel that I could reach out and touch it. It was like the world beyond the mirror in Cocteau's Orpheus. When you reach out and touch the glass, it turns to water and you can plunge through it into the Underworld.

What I saw there was a vision of the village as it had been when I lived there, smoke curling from chimneys over the slate and flagstone roofs, the dark mill on the hillock at the west end, the squat church tower, the High Street curving beside the narrow river. The longer I looked, the more I imagined I could see the people going about their daily business: shopping, making deliveries, gossiping. In my vision, I could even see our little shop, where I met her for the first time that blustery spring day in 1941. The day it all began.

One

Adam Kelly loved to play in the derelict houses, loved the musty smell of the old rooms, the way they creaked and groaned as he moved around inside them, the way the sunlight shone through the laths, casting striped shadows on the walls. He loved to leap the gaps between the broken stairs, heart in his mouth, and hop from rafter to rafter, kicking up plaster dust and watching the motes dance in the filtered light.

This afternoon, Adam had a whole village to play in.

He stood at the rim of the shallow valley, staring at the ruins below and anticipating the adventure to come. This was the day he had been waiting for. Maybe a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Anything could happen down there. The future of the universe depended on Adam today; the village was a test, one of the things he had to conquer before advancing to the Seventh Level.

The only other people in sight stood at the far end, near the old flax mill: a man in jeans and a red T-shirt and a woman all dressed in white. They were pretending to be tourists, pointing their video camera here and there, but Adam suspected they might be after the same thing he was. He had played the game often enough on his computer to know that deception was everywhere and things were

never what they seemed. Heaven help us, he thought, if *they* got to it first.

He half slid and half ran down the dirt slope, skidding to a halt when he reached the red, baked earth at the bottom. There were still patches of mud around; all that water, he supposed, wouldn't just evaporate over a few weeks.

Adam paused and listened. Even the birds were silent. The sun beat down and made him sweat behind his ears, at the back of his neck and in the crack of his bum. His glasses kept slipping down his nose. The dark, ruined cottages wavered in the heat like a wall behind a workman's brazier.

Anything could happen now. The Talisman was here somewhere, and it was Adam's job to find it. But where to begin? He didn't even know what it looked like, only that he would know it when he found it and that there must be clues somewhere.

He crossed the old stone bridge and walked into one of the half-demolished cottages, aware of the moist, cool darkness gathering around him like a cloak. It smelled like a bad toilet, or as if some gigantic alien creature had lain down to die in a hot, fetid swamp.

Sunlight slanted in through the space where the roof had been, lighting the far wall. The dark stones looked slick and greasy as an oil spill. In places, the heavy stone flags that formed the floor had shifted and cracked, and thick gobbets of mud oozed up between them. Some of the slabs wobbled when Adam stood on them. He felt poised over quicksand ready to suck him down to the earth's core if he made one wrong move.

There was nothing in this house. Time to move on.

Outside, he could see no one. The two tourists seemed

to have left now, unless they were hiding, lying in wait for him behind the ruined mill.

Adam noticed an outbuilding near the bridge, the kind of place that had perhaps once been used to store coal or keep food cold. He had heard about the old days before electric fires and fridges. It might even have been a toilet. Hard to believe, he knew, but once people had to go outside to the toilet, even in winter.

Whatever it had been, The Destructors had left it largely alone. About seven feet high, with a slanting flagstone roof still intact, it seemed to beckon him to come and vanquish it. Here, at least, was a structure he could mount to get a clear view. If the pretend-tourists were hiding nearby, he would see them from up there.

Adam walked around the outbuilding and was pleased to see that on one side a number of stones stuck out farther than others, like steps. Carefully, he rested his weight on the first one. It was slippery, but it held fast. He started to climb. Every step seemed solid enough, and soon he was at the top.

He pulled himself onto the roof. It slanted at only a slight angle, so it was easy enough to walk on. First, he stood near the edge, cupped his hand over his eyes to shield out the harsh sun and looked in every direction.

To the west stood the flax mill, and the strangers were now nowhere in sight. The land to both the north and south was covered in woods, so it was hard to see anything through the dense green foliage. To the east lay the tear-drop shape of Harksmere Reservoir. On The Edge, which ran along the south side of the reservoir, a couple of car windscreens flashed in the sun. Other than that, there was hardly any movement in the world at all, hardly a leaf trembling.

Satisfied he wasn't being watched, Adam struck out over the roof. It was only about four or five feet wide, but when he got to the middle he felt the faintest tremor, then, before he could dash the short distance to the other side, the thick stone slabs gave way beneath him. For a moment he hung suspended in air, as if he might float there forever. He stuck his arms out and flapped them like wings, but to no avail. With a scream, he plunged down into the darkness.

He landed on his back on a cushion of mud; his left wrist cracked against a fallen flagstone and his right arm, stretched out to break his fall, sank up to the elbow.

As he lay there, winded, looking up at the square of blue sky above him, he saw two of the remaining roof slabs tilt and fall towards him. Each one was about three feet square and six inches thick, enough to smash him to a pulp if it hit him. But he couldn't move; he felt trapped there, spellbound by the falling slabs.

They seemed to drift down in slow motion, like autumn leaves on a windless day. His mind emptied of everything. He felt no panic, no fear, just a sort of acceptance, as if he had reached a turning-point in his short life, and it was out of his hands now. He couldn't have explained it if he'd tried, but at that moment, lying on his cot of warm mud watching the dark stone flags wheel down across the blue of the sky, young as he was, he knew there was nothing he could do to avoid whatever fate had in store for him; whichever way it went, he could only go with it.

This must be the Seventh Level, he thought as he held his breath, waiting for the impact, waiting to feel his bones breaking, grinding against one another.

One slab fell to his left, embedded itself in the mud and tilted against the wall like an old gravestone. The other fell

to his right and cracked in two against one of the floor flags. One half tipped towards him, just grazing his upper arm, which was sticking out of the mud, and raising a few drops of blood.

Adam took a deep breath and looked up through the roof at the sky. No more slabs. So he had been spared; he was alive. He felt light-headed. There was nothing seriously damaged, he thought, as he started to move his limbs slowly. His left wrist hurt a lot, and it would probably come up in one hell of a bruise, but it didn't feel broken. His right arm was still thrust deep in the mud, and the slab chafed against his grazed elbow. He tried to wiggle his fingers under the mud to find out if he could still feel them, and they brushed against something hard.

It felt like a cluster of smooth, hard spindles, or a bundle of short rods. Curious, he pushed his arm in deeper and grasped it tightly, the way he used to hold his mother's hand in town when he was very small and frightened of all the crowds; then he leaned his weight back over to the left, gritting his teeth as the pain seared through his injured wrist, and tugged.

Inch by inch, he dragged his arm free, keeping a firm grasp on his prize. The mud made sucking, slurping sounds as he pulled. Finally, he was able to free the object he was holding. He rested it against the slab and edged back towards the far wall to study it.

The thing lay against the flagstone in the dim light, fingers hooked over the top, as if it were trying to pull itself out of the grave. It was the skeleton of a hand, the bones crusted with moist, dark earth.

