



JAMES PATTERSON

BEACH ROAD

PETER DE JONGE

Beach Road

A NOVEL BY

James Patterson
Peter de Jonge



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For Daina, Matthew, Joseph, and Porter.

Love, Peter

And as always, for Jack and Suzie.

Love, Jim

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In the summer of 2003 there were three brutal and tragic murders in East Hampton, a wealthy beach community on Long Island, and two related murders in New York City. These were the subject of countless news stories the following year, both in New York and nationally.

But the horror of the murders paled in comparison to the tension and social upheaval in the Hamptons leading up to and during the murder trial.

This is the story of what happened, and it is told from several points of view. Keep in mind that people often lie, especially in the current age, and that the full extent of their lies can be almost beyond our comprehension.

The players, in order of appearance:

*Nikki Robinson, a seventeen-year-old part-time housemaid
in East Hampton, Long Island*

*Tom Dunleavy, a former professional athlete, now a defense
attorney in the Hamptons*

*Dante Halleyville, accused of four of the murders, one of
the most talented schoolboy athletes in the country*

*Katherine Costello, another important defense lawyer in
the murder trial*

Loco, a drug dealer who supplied the Hamptons

Detective Connie P. Raiborne, a streetwise Brooklyn detective

Marie Scott, Dante's grandmother and his mentor in all ways

This is their story.

Prologue

Somebody Else's Summerhouse

Chapter 1

Nikki Robinson

SEVENTEEN AND CRIMINALLY CUTE, Nikki Robinson sulks through the sultry afternoon trying to keep from staring at her useless shocking-pink cell phone. She hasn't heard from Feifer in three days and is getting the awful feeling she's already been dumped and just hasn't been told yet.

So when Nikki's cell rings while she's waiting in line to pay for her drink at Kwik Mart, her heart goes off with it. She grabs for the phone so fast her best friend, Rowena, behind the counter flashes her a disapproving look that says, "Chill, girl."

Rowena is all about maintaining dignity under romantic duress, and as usual, she's right. It's only Maidstone

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Interiors calling about a cleaning job for Nikki out in Montauk.

Nikki has been working for Maidstone all summer and likes it okay, but the thing about Maidstone is that she never knows where they're going to send her.

It takes Nikki forty minutes to drive from Kings Highway in Bridgehampton to Montauk, and another five to find the hilly neighborhood perched just above Route 27 where all the streets are named for dead presidents — and not the recent ones, the ones who have been dead awhile.

Forty-one Monroe is neither a mansion nor a dump, but somewhere in between, and as soon as she gets through the door, she sees it's nothing catastrophic and was probably rented by a couple, maybe a small family.

Besides the steady money, what Nikki likes best about this job is that she's alone. She may be cleaning white folks' houses, but at least they aren't standing over her shoulder, watching and supervising her every move. Plus she can dress how she wants, and so she pulls off her jeans and T-shirt, revealing a skimpy two-piece bathing suit underneath. She puts on her headphones and some R. Kelly, and gets busy.

Nikki starts with the ground-floor bedroom. She gathers the dirty towels and strips the sheets, balls them up in a giant damp pile, and wrestles it down the steep basement staircase. She quickly gets the first load of wash running, then races all the way up to the second floor, and by now

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her dark skin, which she sometimes loves and sometimes hates, is shimmering.

When she reaches the landing, there's a funky smell in the air, as if someone's been burning incense or, now that she gets a better whiff, smoking reefer.

That's nothing too out of the ordinary. Renters can be stoners too.

But when Nikki swings open the door to the master bedroom, her heart jumps into her mouth, and yet somehow she manages to scream and to think, *The white devil*.

Chapter 2

POISED ON THE BED with a long, curved fishing knife in his hand, and wearing nothing but boxers and a twisted grin, is a skinny white guy who looks as though he just got out of prison. His hair is bleached white, and his ghostly pale skin is covered with piercings and tattoos.

But the scariest part, maybe even scarier than the knife, is his eyes. “I *know* you, Nikki Robinson,” he says. “I know where you live. I even know where you work.”

For a couple seconds that feel much longer, those flat, horror-movie eyes freeze Nikki in the doorway and seem to nail her Reeboks to the floor.

Her lungs are useless now too. She can’t even get enough air to scream again.

Somehow she breaks the paralyzing spell enough to lift one foot, then the other, and now she’s moving, and *scream-*

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ing, running for her life toward the bathroom door at the far end of the hall.

Nikki is fast, a hurdler on the Bridgehampton High School varsity team, faster than all but a handful of the boys, and faster than this snaky, beady-eyed intruder too.

She reaches the bathroom door before him, and even though her hands shake, she manages to slam and lock it behind her.

Her chest heaving so hard she can barely hear his footsteps, she leans her head against the door, her terrified reflection looking back at her in the full-length mirror.

Then turning and pressing her back against the door, she desperately scans the room for a way out.

The window leads to a roof. If she can get on the roof, she can find a way down or, if she has to, jump.

And then she sees it. But she sees it too late.

The brass doorknob twists in the light.

Not the doorknob that's pressing into her back, either. A second doorknob on the other side of the sink, attached to another door, a door she didn't know was there because she's never been to this house until now, a door that leads directly from the bedroom.

As she stares in horror, the doorknob stops turning and the door slowly pushes open, and he's in the tiny bathroom with her. The white devil.

There is *nowhere to go, nowhere to go, nowhere to go*, she thinks, her terror bouncing back at her from every mirror.