

JAMES # **1** BESTSELLER
PATTERSON

**ALEX CROSS "IS ONE OF
THE GREAT CREATIONS
OF THRILLER FICTION."**

—Dallas Morning News

**JACK &
JILL**

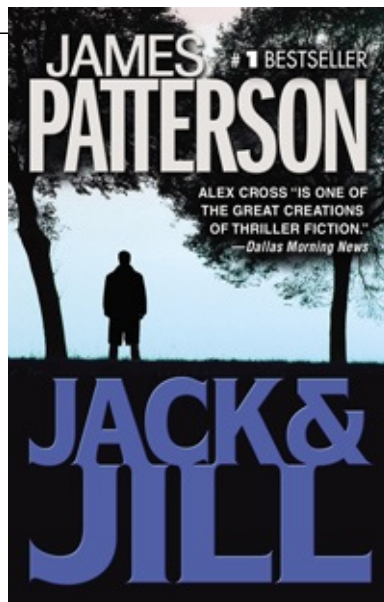
Jack & Jill

James Patterson



Little, Brown and Company

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PROLOGUE

THE GAMES BEGIN

SAM HARRISON swung his agile body out of the silver blue Ford Aerostar, which he had parked on Q Street in the Georgetown section of Washington. *Horror stories and games are popular for a good reason, he was thinking as he locked the vehicle and set its alarm. Not the comfortable sit-around-the-campfire horror tales and games we used to cherish as kids, but the real-life horror stories that are around us everywhere these days.*

Now I'm living one myself. I'm about to become part of the horror. How easy it is. How terribly, terribly easy to move past the edge and into the darkness.

He had stalked and shadowed Daniel Fitzpatrick for two long weeks. He'd done his job in New York City, London, Boston, and finally, here in Washington, D.C. Tonight he was going to murder the United States senator. In cold blood, execution-style. No one would be able to figure out why. No one would have a clue that might matter later on.

That was the first and most important rule of the game called Jack and Jill.

In many ways this was a textbook celebrity-stalker pattern. He knew it to be true as he took up his post across from 211 Q Street.

And yet, if anyone bothered to look more closely, it was like no other stalking pattern before. What he was going to do now was more provocative than secretly observing Senator Fitzpatrick down obscene numbers of Glenlivet cocktails at The Monocle, his favorite bar in Washington. This was the truest form of madness, Sam Harrison knew. It was *pure* madness. *He didn't believe he was mad. He believed only in the validity of the game of chance.*

And then, less than thirty yards across the shiny-wet street—there was Daniel Fitzpatrick himself. Right on schedule. At least, close enough.

He watched the senator stiffly climb out of a gleaming, navy blue Jaguar coupe, a 1996 model. He wore a gray topcoat with a paisley silk scarf. A sleek, slender woman in a black dress was with him. A Burberry raincoat was casually thrown over her arm. She was laughing at something Fitzpatrick had said. She threw her head back like a beautiful, spirited horse. A wisp of her warm breath met the cool of the night.

The woman was at least twenty years the senator's junior. She wasn't his wife, Sam knew. Dannyboy Fitzpatrick rarely if ever slept with his wife. The blond woman walked with a slight limp, which made the two of them even more intriguing. Memorable, actually.

Sam Harrison concentrated fiercely. *Measure twice, measure five times, if necessary.* He took stock of all the details one final time. He had arrived in Georgetown at eleven-fifteen. He looked as if he belonged in the chic, attractive, fashionable neighborhood around Q Street. He looked exactly right for the part he was going to play.

A very big part in a very big story, one of the biggest in America's history. Or some would say American theater.

A leading-man role, to be sure.

He wore professorial, tortoiseshell glasses for the part. *He never wore glasses. Didn't need them.*

His hair was light blond. *His hair wasn't really blond.*

He called himself Sam Harrison. *His name wasn't really Sam. Or Harrison.*

For that night's special occasion, he'd carefully selected a soft black cashmere turtleneck, charcoal gray trousers, which were pleated and cuffed, and light-brown walking boots. *He wasn't really such a dapper, self-absorbed dresser.* His thick hair was cut short, vaguely reminiscent of the actor Kevin Costner in *The Bodyguard*, one of his least-favorite movies. He carried a small black duffel bag, swinging it like a baton as he now walked briskly toward 211. A camcorder was tucked inside the bag.

He planned to capture as much of this as possible on film. This was history in the making. It really was history: America at the end of its century, America at the end of an era, America at the end.

At quarter to twelve, he entered 211 through a darkened service entryway that smelled strongly of ammonia and of dust and decay. He walked up to the fourth floor, where the senator had his flat, his study, his love nest in the capital.

He reached Daniel Fitzpatrick's door, 4J, at ten minutes to twelve. He was still pretty much on time. So far, so good. Everything was going exactly as planned.

The highly polished mahogany door opened right in his face.

He stared at an ash-blond woman who was slender and trim and well kept. She was actually somewhat plainer looking than she had appeared from a distance. It was the same woman who had gotten out of the blue Jag with Fitzpatrick. The woman with the limp.

Except for a gold barrette in her hair, *a lioness from a trip to the Museum of Modern Art in New York*, and a gold choker, she was gloriously naked.

"Jack," she whispered.

"Jill," he said, and smiled.

*I*N A DIFFERENT PART of Washington, in a different world, another would-be killer was playing an equally terrifying game. He had found an absolutely terrific hiding place among the thick pines and a few towering, elderly oaks at the center of Garfield Park. He made himself comfortable inside a kind of tent formed by the overhanging tree limbs and a few sturdy, overgrown shrubs.

“*Let’s get busy,*” he whispered, though no one was in the hiding place with him. This was going to be a wonderful adventure, a great fantasy. He believed it with his whole heart, body, and what remained of his soul.

He sat cross-legged on the damp grass and began to work on his face and hair. A tune from the rock band Hole was blasting from the speakers inside his head. This was really good stuff. He loved it to death. Disguises and costumes were a rush. They were about the only thing that let you truly escape, and goddamn, *did he ever need to escape.*

When he eventually finished with the costume, he emerged from the shadows of the trees. He had to laugh. He was cracking himself up today. This was the best yet. It was so goofy that it was great. Reminded him of a good joke: *Roses are red/violets are blue/I’m schizophrenic/and so am I.*

Hardy-har!

He definitely looked like an old, homeless fuck-bum now. He really did look like a hopeless old fart. Like the mangy character in the rock song “Aqualung.” He had put on a white fright wig and a salt-and-pepper beard from an actor’s costume kit. Any slight failure of his imagination, or skill as a makeup artist, was covered by the floppy hood of his sweatshirt.

The sweatshirt had HAPPY, HAPPY. JOY, JOY printed on it.

What an incredible, mindblowing adventure this was going to be, he kept thinking. *Happy, happy. Joy, joy.* That was the ticket. That said it all. The irony just killed him.

The killer-to-be crossed the park, walking quickly now, almost breaking into a run. He was headed in the general direction of the Anacostia River.

He began to see people. Strollers, muggers, lovers, whatever the hell they were. Most of them were black, but that was okay. That was good, actually. Nobody gave a damn about the blacks in D.C. That was a fact of life.

“Aqualung, oh-oh-oh, Aqualung,” he sang the old rock-and-roll tune as he walked. It was from a really great old band called Jethro Tull. He listened to rock music incessantly, even in his sleep. *Earphones on all the time.* He had just about memorized the entire history of rock and roll. If he could just force himself to listen to Hootie and the Blowfish, he’d have it all down cold.

Hardy-har, he laughed at his Hootie joke. He was in a really fine mood today. This was such a cool fucked-up, freaky blast of a head trip. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Best and worst, worst and best, worst and worse?

He had already selected the spot for the murder. The thicket of spruce trees and evergreens up close to the Southeast Freeway. It was wild and overgrown and nearly perfect.

The spot was at a ninety-degree angle to a grouping of *delapo*, yellow-brick row houses and a popular bodega on Sixth Street in Southeast. He had already scouted there, scoped the area out, fallen

in love with his spot. He could already see kids from the Sojourner Truth Elementary School traipsing in and out of the corner candy store. The little buggers were so cute at that age.

Man, I hate cute with a passion you wouldn't believe. Little fucking robots was what they really were. Mean little parasites, too. *Kidz!* Everything about them was so *kute*.

He scrunched down and climbed under the thick, scratchy bushes and got down to serious business. He began to blow up several latex balloons—red, orange, blue, yellow ones.

These were big, really colorful suckers that no kids in their wrong mind could resist. Personally, he had always hated balloons intensely. Hated the forced, phony gaiety they seemed to symbolize. But most kids were ya-ya about balloons. Figured, right?

He tied about a ten-foot length of twine around one balloon. Then he secured the string to a thick tree branch.

The balloon floated lazily above the old tree. It looked like a pretty, decapitated head.

He waited in his tree hut. *He hung out with himself*, which he liked to do anyway.

“Got to waste some-*body* to-day,” he hummed a little non-song to a non-melody. “Got to, got to. Just gotta, gotta, gotta,” he sang and kind of liked the riff.

He heard something move near his hiding place. Something *cracked*. A branch or something? Somebody come to visit?

He listened closely. Tree branches were definitely being moved, stepped on, broken. Everything sounded amplified—like *SNAPPP!*

His mind had slipped away and the noise startled the hell out of him, if anybody really wanted to know the truth. His adrenaline was kicking in like crazy. He almost swallowed his Adam's apple.

Suddenly, the top half of a face appeared, came into his view. Just the forehead and the whites of someone's eyes.

THE WHITES OF HER EYES!

Peeking through the tree branches at him.

He saw the face of a tiny black girl. Five or six years old, really cute. She saw him, too. *Fair and square*.

I SEE YOU, HONEYPIE. YES, I DO. I SEE YOU!

“Hi.” He said it real nice and polite, which he could be when he wanted to. He smiled, and she *almost* smiled back.

He spoke softly. “You want a big balloon? I've got plenty of extra balloons, balloons-a-plenty, balloons galore. Here's a cherry red balloon with your name on it.”

The little girl just stared at him. She didn't speak a syllable. Didn't move. She was afraid of him—imagine that. Probably confused because he'd said her name was on one of the balloons.

“Okay, no balloon then. Fine. Forget about the free balloon offer. No balloon for you, little girl. That's okey-dokey with me. No free balloon today! No sir!”

“Yessss, please,” she suddenly said. Her brown eyes widened like blossoming flowers. Beautiful little girl, right? Beautiful, chestnut brown eyes.

“Stop being so shy, girl. Come over here, I'll give you a big, beautiful balloon. Let's see, I've got stop-sign red, sky blue, Popsicle orange, mellow yellow. Every color in the rainbow and then some.”

He mimicked *somebody*—maybe it was that nutcase Kevin Bacon in *The River Wild*, which he'd rented a week or so back. Two weeks back? Who knew? Who cared! As he was speaking, his hand tightened on the handle of a miniature baseball bat, which was reinforced with electrical tape. The bat was eighteen and a half inches long, the kind the local gangbangers used to keep law and order in the projects.

He continued to speak to the little girl in a happy singsong that was actually sarcastic and ironic a hell.

“Red one,” the girl finally chirped. Of course. She had a *red* ribbon in her hair. Red is the color of my true love’s love.

She lightly, very tentatively, stepped out into the clearing. He noticed her feet were so tiny. Like a size *minus* three. She reached toward the colorful balloons clutched tightly in his outstretched hand. She didn’t seem to notice that his hand was shaking badly.

Behind his back, he gripped the short, powerful ballbat. Then he swung—real hard.

Happy, happy. Joy, joy.

COULD THEY actually get away with murder—especially a high-level, provocative murder like this? Jack was confident they could. It was easier than anyone knew to kill another human being, or several of them, and never get caught, never even be suspected. It happened all the time.

Jill was scared and visibly tense, though. He couldn't blame her. In "real life," she was a Washington careerist, well-bred, bright, certainly not the typical murderous kook you read about. No, a very likely *Jill*, and therefore perfect for her part in the game of games. Almost as perfect as he was for his.

"He's drunk, completely out," she whispered as they stood in the dark foyer of the apartment. "It helps that he's such an absolutely repellent snake."

"You know what they say about our Dannyboy. He's a very bad senator, but a much worse date."

A hint of a smile—a nervous smile—from her. "Bad joke, but I can vouch for that. Let's go. *Jack*."

Jill turned on her bare heels, and he followed close behind. He watched the slight hitch in her step bewitching in its way. He watched her slender figure retreat through a tiny sitting room that was dimly lit by the hallway lamp. This was the way to the flat's bedroom, he knew.

They walked silently through a small living room. An American flag proudly stood beside the stone fireplace. The sight of the flag turned his stomach. Color photographs on the wall of a sailing regatta somewhere, probably Cape Cod.

"Izzit you, my dear?" a gruff, whiskey-soaked voice thundered from behind the living room walls.

"Who else could it be?" Jill answered.

Jack and Jill entered the bedroom together. "Surprise party," Jack announced. He had a Beretta semiautomatic out. It was aimed at the senator's head.

His gun hand was steady, his head very clear now. *History in the making. No chance to go back now.*

Daniel Fitzpatrick bolted up in his bed, surprised and burning mad. "What the bloody hell? What the... who the frig are you? How the shit did you get in here?" he slurred his words. His face and neck were bright red.

Jack couldn't help it—he smiled in spite of everything that was going on. The senator looked like a beached whale, or perhaps an aging walrus, in his fancy bed.

"I guess you could say I'm your despicable past, finally catching up to you, Senator," he said. "Now shut up. Please. Let's make this as easy as we possibly can."

He stared at Daniel Fitzpatrick and was reminded of something he'd read somewhere recently. Upon seeing the senator at a speaking engagement, a spectator had remarked, "*My God, he's an old man now.*" Indeed he was. Fitzpatrick was a white-haired, jowly, graceless, sprawlingly fat, old white man.

He was also the enemy.

Jack opened the black duffel bag and handed Jill a pair of handcuffs. "One hand to each bedpost. Please and thank you."

"It will be my pleasure," she said. There was a simple elegance in the way she spoke, acted, even

the way she moved.

“You’re in on this?” Fitzpatrick gasped as he looked around at the blond woman he’d picked up at the bar in La Colline. He seemed to be actually seeing her for the first time.

Jill smiled. “No, no. I was attracted by your vast, bloated belly, your alcoholic breath.”

Jack took out the camcorder and handed it over to Jill. She immediately aimed it at Senator Fitzpatrick, focused, and started to film. She was good with the camera.

“What in God’s name are you doing?” Fitzpatrick asked. His washed-out blue eyes were wide with astonishment, and then with genuine fear. “What the hell do you want? What’s going on here? Dammit, I’m a United States senator.”

Jill began with the shocked and surprised and *hurt* look on the senator’s face. She pulled out to a wider shot. *Oops, a little too wide.* Grabbed focus again.

Jack smiled at the inappropriate outburst of bravado. How very *Fitzpatrick*.

Then, *voilà!* It was as if the whiskey-dullness swirling in his brain suddenly stopped. Daniel Fitzpatrick finally understood. “I don’t want to die,” he whispered.

Tears unexpectedly rolled from his eyes. It was strangely affecting. “Please don’t do this. You don’t have to hurt me,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be like this. Please, I beg you. Listen to me. Will you just listen to what I have to say?”

This was incredibly important footage, Jill knew. Academy Award stuff. Perhaps the documentary film of the century. They needed this for the game of games, for one of the surprises later on.

Jack walked briskly across the bedroom. He placed the Beretta inches from the senator’s forehead.

This was it. This was where the exquisite game truly began. Rule Two: *This is history. What you’re doing is important. Never forget that for a single moment.*

“I’m going to kill you, Senator Fitzpatrick. There’s nothing for us to talk about. There’s no way out of this. You were a Roman Catholic, so if you believe in God, say a prayer. Please say one for me, too. Say a prayer for Jack and Jill.”

This was gut-check time. He noticed that his hand was shaking a little now. Jill saw it, too.

He told himself, *This is an execution, and it’s well deserved. And this is most definitely a horror story that I’m in.*

He fired once, from a distance of no more than a few inches. Daniel Fitzpatrick’s head exploded. He fired a second time. *Measure twice; cut twice as well.*

History was made.

The game of games had begun.

Jack and Jill.

PART I

IT'S TOMORROW AGAIN

CHAPTER

1

*O*HNNO, it's tomorrow again.

It seemed as if I had no sooner fallen asleep than I heard banging in the house. It was loud, as disturbing as a car alarm. Persistent. Trouble too close to home?

“Shit. Dammit,” I whispered into the soft, deep folds of my pillow. “Leave me alone. Let me sleep through the night like a normal person. Go away from here.”

I reached for the lamp and knocked over a couple of books on the table. *The General's Daughter* and *My American Journey* and *Snow Falling on Cedars*. The mishap jolted me fully awake.

I grabbed my service handgun from a drawer and hurried downstairs, passing the kids' room on the way. I heard, or thought that I could hear, the sound of their soft breathing inside. I had been reading them Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* the night before. *Don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: Your father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor*.

I clutched the Glock even more tightly in my right hand. The banging stopped. Then started up again. *Downstairs*.

I glanced at my wristwatch. It was *three-thirty* in the morning. Jesus, mercy. The witching hour again. The hour I often woke up without any help from outside forces, from things that go BANG, BANG, BANG in the middle of the night.

I continued down the steep, treacherous stairs. *Cautious, suspicious*. Suddenly, it was quiet all around me.

I made no sound myself. My skin felt electrified in the darkness. This was not the recommended way to start the day, or even the middle of the night. *Don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: Your father had an accident....*

I continued into the kitchen—my gun drawn—where I suddenly saw the source of the banging. The day's first mystery was solved.

My friend and partner was lurking at the back door like some high-octane version of a neighborhood hugger-mugger.

John Sampson was the noisemaker; he was the trouble in my life; the day's first disturbance, anyway. All six foot nine, two hundred forty pounds of him. Two-John as he's sometimes called. Ma Mountain.

“There's been a murder,” he said as I unlocked, unchained, and opened up for him. “This one is a honey, Alex.”

“OH JESUS, JOHN. You know what time it is? You have any concept of time? Please get the hell away from my house. Go home to your own house. Bang on your *own* door in the middle of the night.”

I groaned and slowly shook my head back and forth, working nasty sleep-kinks out of my neck and shoulders. I wasn't quite awake yet. Maybe this was all a bad dream that I was having. *Maybe Sampson wasn't on the back porch. Maybe I was still in bed with my pillow-lover. And maybe not.*

“It can wait,” I said. “Whatever the hell it is.”

“Oh, but it can't,” he answered, shaking his head. “Believe me, Sugar, it can't.”

I heard a creaking noise behind me in the house. I swung around quickly, still a little spooked and jumpy.

My little girl was standing there in the kitchen. Jannie was in her electric-blue-butterfly pajamas, in her bare feet, with a frightened look on her face. The latest addition to our family, a beautiful Abyssinian cat named Rosie, trailed Jannie by a step or two. Rosie had heard the noise downstairs, too.

“What's the matter?” Jannie asked in a sleepy whisper, rubbing her eyes. “Why are you up so early? It's something bad, isn't it, Daddy?”

“Go back to sleep, sweetheart,” I told Jannie in the softest voice I could manage. “It's nothing,” I had to lie to my little girl. My work had followed me home again. “We'll go upstairs now, so you can get your beauty sleep.”

I carried her up the stairs, softly nuzzling her cheek on the way, whispering sweet nonsense, dream talk. I tucked her in and checked on my son, Damon. Soon the two of them would be heading off to their respective schools—Damon at Sojourner Truth, Jannie at Union Street. Rosie the cat continually crisscrossed between my legs as I performed my ministrations.

Then I got dressed, and Sampson and I hurried to the early-morning crime scene in his car. We didn't have far to go.

This one is a honey, Alex.

Just four blocks from our house on Fifth Street.

“I'm awake now, whether I like it or not, and I *don't* like it. Tell me about it,” I said to Sampson as I watched the glittering red and blue lights of police cars and EMS trucks come into focus up ahead.

Four blocks from our house.

A lot of blue-and-whites were clustered at the end of a tunnel of leafless oak trees and red-brick project buildings. The disturbance appeared to be at my son Damon's school. (Jannie's school is a dozen blocks in the opposite direction.) My body tensed all over. There was a roaring, wintry shitstorm inside my head.

“It's a little girl, Alex,” Sampson said in an unusually soft voice for him. “Six years old. She was last seen at the Sojourner Truth School this afternoon.”

It was Damon's school. We both sighed. Sampson is almost as close to Damon and Jannie as I am

They feel the same way about him.

~~A lot of people were already gathered outside the Federal-style two-story building that was the Sojourner Truth Elementary School. Half the neighborhood seemed to be up at four in the morning. I saw angry and shocked faces everywhere in the crowd. Some folks were in bathrobes, others wrapped in blankets. Their frosty breath poured out like car exhaust all over the schoolyard. The *Washington Post* had reported that more than five hundred children under the age of fourteen had died in D.C. during the past year alone. But the people here knew that. They didn't have to read it in the newspaper.~~

A little six-year-old girl. Murdered at or near Damon's school, the Truth School. I couldn't have imagined a worse nightmare to wake up to.

"Sorry about this, Sugar," Sampson said as we climbed out of his car. "I figured you had to see this, though, to be here yourself."

MY HEART was hammering and felt as if it were suddenly too big for my chest. My wife, Maria, had been shot down and killed not far from this place. Memories of the neighborhood, memories of a lifetime. *I'll always love you, Maria.*

I saw a dented and rusting truck from the morgue in the schoolyard, and it was an unbelievably disturbing sight for me and everybody else. Rap music with a lot of bass was playing from somewhere on the edge of the bright police lights.

Sampson and I pushed and angled our way through the frightened and uneasy crowd. Some wiseass muttered, "What's up, Chief?" and risked finding out. There was yellow crime-scene tape everywhere on the school grounds.

At six three, I'm not as large as Man Mountain, but we are both big men. We make quite the pair when we arrive at a crime scene: Sampson with his huge shaved skull and black leather car coat; me usually in a gray warm-up jacket from Georgetown. Shoulder holster under the coat. Dressed for the game that I play, a game called *sudden death*.

"Dr. Cross is here," I heard a few low rumbles in the crowd. My name uttered in vain. I tried to ignore the voices as best I could. Block them out of my consciousness. Officially I was a deputy chief of detectives, but I was mostly working as a street detective these days. It was the way I wanted it for now. The way it had to be. This was definitely an "interesting" time for me. I had seen enough homicide and violence for one lifetime. I was considering going into private practice as a shrink again. I was considering a lot of things.

Sampson lightly touched my shoulder. He sensed this was bad for me. He saw it was maybe too close to the bone. "You okay, Alex?"

"I'm fine," I lied for the second time that morning.

"Sure you are, Sugar. You're always fine, even when you're not. You're the dragonslayer, right?" Sampson said and shook his head.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a young woman wearing a black sweatshirt with I'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOU, TYSHEIKA in white letters. Another dead child. *Tysheika*. People in the neighborhood sometimes wore the dark shirts to funerals of murdered kids. My grandmother, Nana Mama, had quite a collection of them.

Something else caught my eye. A woman standing back from the crowd, under the spectral branches of a withering elm. She didn't seem to quite fit with the rest of the neighborhood group. She was tall and nice-looking. She wore a belted raincoat over jeans, and flat shoes. Behind her, I could see a blue sedan. A Mercedes.

She's the one. That's her. She's the one for you. The crazy thought just came out of nowhere. Filled my head with sudden, inappropriate joy.

I made a mental note to find out who she was.

I stopped to talk with a young, intense homicide detective wearing a red Kangol hat with a brown sport jacket and brown knitted tie. I was beginning to take control.

“Bad way to start the day, Alex,” Rakeem Powell said as I came up to him. “Or to end one, in my case.”

I nodded at Rakeem. “Can’t imagine a worse way.” I felt sick in the well of my stomach. “What do you know about this so far, Rakeem? Anything juicy for us to go on? I need to hear it all.”

The detective glanced at his small black notepad. He flipped a few pages. “Little girl’s name is Shanelle Green. Popular girl. A sweetheart, from what I hear so far. She was in the first grade here at the Truth School. Lives two blocks from school in the Northfield Village projects. Parents both work. They let her walk home by herself. Not too goddamn smart, but what can you do, you know? They came home tonight, Shanelle wasn’t there. They reported her missing around eight. That’s the parent over there.”

I glanced around. They were just a couple of kids themselves. Looked completely devastated and heartbroken. I knew they would never be the same after this horrifying night. Nobody could be.

“Either of them suspects?” I had to ask.

Rakeem shook his head and said, “I don’t think so, Alex. Shanelle was their life.”

“Please check them, Rakeem. Check both parents. How did she get here in the schoolyard?” I asked him.

Powell sighed. “That’s the *first* thing we don’t know. *Where* she was killed is the second. *Who* did it is strike three for the Mod Squad.”

It was obvious from looking at Shanelle that she had been dumped here, probably murdered someplace else. We were right at the beginning of this terrible case. Lots of work to do. My case now.

“You know how she was killed?” I asked Rakeem.

The homicide detective frowned. “Take a look for yourself. Tell me what you think.”

I didn’t want to look, but I had to. I bent down close to Shanelle. I could smell the little girl’s blood: *copper, like a lot of pennies had been thrown on the ground*. I couldn’t help thinking of Damon and Jannie, my own kids. I couldn’t stop the overwhelming sadness I felt. It ate at me, like acid splashed all over my body.

I knelt on the cracked and broken concrete to examine the body of the six-year-old girl. Shanelle lay in a fetal position. All she had on was a pair of flowered pink-and-blue underpants. A red bow was impossibly tangled up in her braids, and she had tiny gold earrings in her ears.

The rest of her clothes were missing. The killer had apparently taken the little girl’s school clothes with him.

She was such a little beauty, such a sweetheart, I could see. Even after what someone had done to her. I was looking at the *how*; the manner in which the six-year-old girl had been brutally murdered sometime earlier that night, her whole life silenced in an instant of madness and horror.

I gently turned the girl’s body a few inches. Her head lolled to one side, the neck probably broken. She weighed next to nothing. Just a baby. The right side of her little face was partly gone. *Obliterated* was a better description. The murderer had struck Shanelle so many times, and so violently, that little on the right side of the face was recognizable.

“How could he do this to such a beautiful little girl?” I muttered under my breath. “Poor Shanelle. Poor baby,” I whispered to no one but myself. A tear formed in my eye. I blinked it away. There was no place for that here.

One of Shanelle’s eyes was missing. *Her face is like a two-sided, two-faced mask*. Two sides to a child? Two faces? What did that mean?

There was another fiend on the loose in Washington.

A child killer this time.

A TALL, THIN MAN in a black raincoat and black floppy rain hat slowly, cautiously approached the door of Senator Daniel Fitzpatrick's apartment a little before six o'clock Tuesday morning. He examined the outer hallway for signs of a break-in, a struggle of some sort, but didn't find any.

He was thinking that he didn't want to be outside this apartment or anywhere near it. He wasn't sure what he expected to find inside, but he had the feeling it would be bad. Powerfully, overwhelmingly bad. *This was so unreal.*

It was so odd for him to be here, a mystery inside a mystery. But here he was.

The man noticed everything about the hallway. Sprinkles of fallen plaster on the rug. Eight other doorways in sight. He had once been reasonably good at this routine. Being an investigator was like riding a bicycle, right? Sure it was.

He jimmied open the door to 4J with a square of plastic very much like a credit card, only thinner slicker to the touch. He guessed that breaking and entering was like riding a bike, too. You never forgot how.

"I'm inside 4J," he spoke softly into a compact hand radio.

Sweat had begun to form all over his body. His legs quivered slightly. He was disgusted and he was afraid and he was definitely someplace that he shouldn't be. *Unrealville*, he called it in his mind.

He quickly walked through the foyer and into the small living room with photos of Senator Fitzpatrick on every wall. Still no sign of a break-in or any trouble.

"This could be a very nasty hoax," he reported into the radio. "I hope that's what it is." He paused. "Uh-oh. We have a problem."

Everything had happened in the bedroom, and whoever had done *everything* had left a terrible mess. It was worse than anything he could have imagined it might be.

"This is real bad. Senator Fitzpatrick is dead. Daniel Fitzpatrick *has been* murdered. This is not a hoax. The body appears to be fully rigorous. Flesh has a waxy tone. There's a lot of blood. Jesus, there's a lot of blood."

He bent over the senator's corpse. He could smell cordite, almost taste it on his tongue. Most like from the gun that killed Fitzpatrick. Unfortunately, there was much more to the brutal murder scene. Too much for him to handle. He fought to keep his cool. *Riding a bike, right?*

"Two shots to the head. Close-in. Execution-style," he said into the handset. "Entry wounds about an inch apart."

He sighed heavily. Waited a moment, then began again. They didn't need to know everything he was seeing and feeling right now.

"The senator is handcuffed to his bedposts. Look like police cuffs to me. His body is nude and not pretty sight. Penis and scrotum appear to have been gouged out of the body. There's *a lot* of blood all over the bed, a humongous stain. Big stain on the rug, too, where it soaked through."

He forced his face even closer to the senator's silver-haired chest. He didn't like it, being this close to a dead man—or any man, for that matter. Probably real silver. He smelled of a woman's perfume.

The tall man, *the investigator*, was almost certain of it. “The D.C. police are going to be guessing jealous lover. Some kind of crime of high passion,” he said. “Wait—there’s something else here. Okay. Hold on. I’ve got to check this out.”

He didn’t know how he’d missed it at first, but he sure as hell saw the note now. It was right next to the cordless telephone on the bed stand. Impossible to miss, right? But he’d missed it. He picked it up in his gloved hand.

The note was typewritten on thick, expensive bond. He read it quickly. Then he read it again, just to be sure... that the note was for *real*.

Ah Dannyboy, we knew ya all too well
One useless, thieving, rich bastard down
So many more to go.
Jack and Jill came to The Hill
To hose down all the slime
Most imperiled
Was poor Fitzpatrick
Right schmuck, wrong place, wrong time.
Truly,
Jack and Jill

He read the note over the hand phone. He took one more look around, then left the senator’s apartment as it was: *in a state of bedlam and horror and death*. When he was safely down on Q Street he called in the homicide to the Washington police.

He made the call anonymously. No one could know that he’d been inside the senator’s apartment, or especially, *how it came to happen, and who he was*. If anybody found out, all hell would really break loose—as if it hadn’t started already.

Everything was unreal, and it promised to get much worse. Jack and Jill had promised it.

One useless, thieving, rich bastard down
So many more to go.

AT EVERY HUMAN TRAGEDY like this one, there is always someone who points. A man stood outside the crime scene tape and pointed at the murdered child and also at me. I was remembering Jannie's prophetic words to me earlier that morning: *It's something bad, isn't it, Daddy?*

Yes, it was. The baddest of the bad. The murder scene at the Sojourner Truth School was heartbreaking to me, and, I was sure, to everyone else. The schoolyard was the saddest, most desolate place in the world.

The chatter of portable radios violated the air and made it hard to breathe. I could still smell the little girl's blood. It was thick in my nostrils and my throat, but mostly inside my head.

Shanelle Green's parents were weeping nearby, but so were other people from the neighborhood, even complete strangers to the little girl. In most cities, in most civilized countries, a child murdered so young would be a catastrophe, but not in Washington, where hundreds of children die violent deaths every single year.

"I want as large a street canvass as we can manage on this one," I told Rakeem Powell. "Sampson and I will be part of the canvass ourselves."

"I hear you. We're on it in a *big* way. Sleep is overrated, anyway."

"Let's go, John. We've got to move on this now," I finally said to Sampson.

He didn't argue or object. A murder like this is usually solved in the first twenty-four hours, or it isn't solved. We both knew that.

From 6:00 A.M. on, Sampson and I canvassed the neighborhood with the other detectives and patrolmen that cold, miserable morning. We had to do it our way, house by house, street by street, mostly on foot. We needed to be involved in this case, to do something, to solve the heinous murder quickly.

About ten in the morning, we heard about another shocking homicide in Washington. Senator Daniel Fitzpatrick had been murdered the night before. It had been a real bad night, hadn't it?

"Not our job," Sampson said with cold, flat eyes. "Not our problem. Somebody else's."

I didn't disagree.

No one Sampson or I spoke to that morning had seen anything out of the ordinary around the Sojourner Truth School. We heard the usual complaints about the drug pushers, the zombielike crackheads, the prossies who work on Eighth Street, the growing number of gangbangers.

But nothing out of the usual.

"People loved that little sweetheart Shanelle," the ageless Hispanic lady who seemed to have run the corner grocery near the school forever told Sampson and me. "She always buy her Gummi Bears. She have such a pretty smile, you know?"

No, I had never seen Shanelle Green smile, but I found that I could almost picture it. I also had a fixed image of the battered right side of the little girl's face. I carried it around like a bizarre wallet photo inside my head.

Uncle Jimmie Kee, a successful and influential Korean American who owned several neighborhood

businesses, was glad to talk with us. Jimmie is a good friend of ours. Occasionally, he comes along with us to a Redskins or Bullets game. He supplied a name that we already had on our short-list of suspects.

“What about this bad actor, Chop-It-Off-Chucky?” Uncle Jimmie volunteered as we spoke in the back of Ho-Woo-Jung, his popular restaurant on Eighth Street. I read the sign behind Jimmie: IMMIGRATION IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY.

“Nobody catch that motherfucker yet. He kill other children before. He the worst man in Washington, D.C. Next to the president,” Jimmie said and chuckled wickedly.

“No bodies, though. No proof of it,” Sampson said to Jimmie. “We don’t even know if there really is a Chucky.”

That was true enough. For years there had been rumors about a horrifying child molester who worked the Northfield Village neighborhood, but there was nothing concrete. Nothing had ever been proved.

“Chucky real,” Uncle Jimmie insisted. His dark eyes narrowed to even thinner slits. “Chucky real as the devil. I see Chop-It-Off-Chucky in my dreams sometimes, Alex. So do the children who live around here.”

“You ever hear anything more specific about Chucky? Where he’s been seen? Who saw him?” I asked. “Help us out if you can, Jimmie.”

“Oh, I gladly do that.” He nodded his head and bunched his thick brown lips, his triple chin, his bulging throat. Jimmie habitually wore a chocolate brown suit with a tan fedora that bobbed as he spoke. “You meditating yet, Alex, getting in touch with chi energy?” he asked me.

“I’m thinking about it, thinking about my chi, Jimmie. Maybe my chi is running a little low right now. Tell us about Chucky.”

“I know lots bad stories about Chop-It-Off-Chucky. Scare kids all the time. Even the gangbangers scared of him. Young mothers, grandmothers, put up handbills in playgrounds. In my stores, too. Sad stories of missing children. I always permit it, Detectives. Man who harms children is the worst. You agree, Alex? You see it differently?”

“No. I agree with you. That’s why Sampson and I are out here today.”

I knew a lot about the child molester who had been nicknamed Chop-It-Off-Chucky. The unsubstantiated rumor was that he sliced off the genitalia of young kids who lived in the projects. Little boys and girls. No gender preference. Whether or not it was true, it seemed undeniable that someone had molested several children from the Northfield and Southview Terrace projects, not far from here. Other children had simply disappeared.

The police in the area didn’t have the resources to create an effective crisis team to find Chucky, *Chucky existed*. I had gone to the wall about it several times with the chief of detectives, but nothing had happened. Extra detectives never seemed available for duty in Southeast. The unfairness of the situation put me in a rage, made me as crazy as anything I can think of.

“Sounds like another Mission: Impossible,” Sampson said as we walked up G Street, in the general direction of the marine barracks. “We’re on our own. We’re supposed to catch a chimera.”

“Nice image,” I said, and had to smile at Man Mountain, his wild imagination, his *mind*.

“Thought you’d like it, man of culture and refinement that you are.”

We were sipping steaming herb tea from Jimmie’s restaurant. Patrolling the street. We *looked* like detectives, with our collars up and all. Big bad detectives. I wanted people to see us out working the neighborhood.

“No real leads, no clues, no support,” I said, agreeing with Sampson’s judgment of the current sta

of affairs. “We take the assignment, anyway?”

~~“We always do,” he said. His eyes were suddenly hard and dull and almost scary to me. “Watch out, Chucky, watch your back. We’re right on your sorry mythical ass.”~~

“Your chimera ass.”

“Exactly so, Sugar. Exactly so.”

IT WAS REAL GOOD to be working the streets of Southeast with Sampson again. It always is, even on a horror-show murder case that can make my blood boil over. Our last big case had taken place in North Carolina and California, but Sampson had been around only for the beginning and end of it. The two of us have been fast friends since we were nine or ten, and growing up in this same neighborhood. We get closer every year it seems. No, we *do* get closer.

“What’s our primary goal here, Sugar?” Sampson asked as we walked along G Street. He had on the black leather car coat, nasty Wayfarer sunglasses, a slick black bandanna. It worked for him. “How do we know that we did good today?” he asked.

“We get the word out that we’re personally looking for the Truth School killer,” I said. “We show our pretty faces around. Make the families here feel as safe as we can.”

“Yeah, and then we catch Chop-It-Off-Chucky and chop *his* off,” Sampson said and grinned like the big bad wolf that he can be. “I’m not kidding.”

I didn’t doubt it for a minute.

When I finally got home that night, it was past ten. Nana Mama was waiting up for me. She had already put Damon and Jannie to bed. The concerned look on her face told me that she couldn’t get to sleep, which is unusual for her. Nana could sleep in the eye of a hurricane. Sometimes, she *is* the eye of a hurricane.

“Hello, sweetheart,” she said to me. “Bad day for you? I can see that it was.” Sometimes she can be unbelievably sympathetic and kind and sweet, too. I like that she goes both ways equally well, and I can never predict which way is coming at me next.

As we sat together on the living room couch, my eighty-one-year-old grandmother held my hand in both of hers. I told her what I knew so far. She was shaking slightly and that wasn’t like her, either. She is not a weak person, not in any way. She rarely shows fear to anyone, even me. Nana Mama does not seem to be losing anything of herself; instead, she is becoming more luminous and concentrated.

“I feel so bad about this killing at the Sojourner Truth School,” Nana said, and her head lowered.

“I know. It’s all I’ve thought about today. I’m working every angle I can.”

“You know much about Sojourner Truth, Alex?”

“I know she was a powerful abolitionist, an ex-slave.”

“Sojourner Truth should be talked about when they mention Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Alex. She couldn’t read, so she memorized most of the Bible for her teaching. She actually helped stop segregation of the transportation system here in Washington. And now we have this abomination at the school named in her honor.

“*Catch him, Alex,*” Nana suddenly whispered in a low, almost desperate, voice. “Please catch this terrible man. I can’t even say the name they call him—this *Chucky*. He’s real, Alex. He’s not a made-up bogeyman.”

I would definitely try my damndest. I was on the murder case. I was chasing down the chimera as best I could.

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