

**YOU ARE DEAD**

**PETER JAMES**

**MACMILLAN**

# 1

**Thursday 11 December**

Logan was driving fast in the pelting rain, hurrying home, glad that her shitty day which had gone from bad to worse, and then progressively worse still, was nearly at an end. She was looking forward to a large glass of chilled white wine and a sneaky cigarette on the balcony before Jamie got home. The familiar Radio Sussex jingle played, then the female presenter announced it was 5.30 p.m. and time for the news headlines. As Logan listened, with half an ear, she was blissfully unaware that by this time tomorrow evening she would be the lead item on the local news, and the subject of one of the biggest manhunts ever launched by Sussex Police.

Her catalogue of disasters had started as she had got out of bed, late for work, with a splitting headache after a tiresome dinner with clumsy, untidy Jamie and tripped over a boot he'd left on the carpet. She'd stumbled forward, gashing her big toe open on the edge of the bathroom door. She should have gone to hospital, but she couldn't spare the time for the inevitable wait at A&E, so she'd bandaged it herself and hoped for the best.

Then to add insult to injury she had been flashed by the same damned speed camera she had driven past every working day for the past few years, at a careful 32 mph. Somehow, today, in her rush to get to work for her first appointment she had totally forgotten it was there, and had gone past it at well over 45 mph.

The gilding on the lily came when one of her partners in the chiropractic clinic – the woman who brought in the largest share of their income – announced she was pregnant with triplets, and intended if all went well to be a full-time mum. Without her income stream, the future of the place could be in doubt.

Overshadowing all of that were her concerns about Jamie. He

## PETER JAMES

stubbornly refused to accept anything was wrong. But there was; there was so much wrong. His untidiness, which at first had amused her, had grown to irritate her beyond belief – especially when he'd told her crassly that it was a woman's role to keep the home tidy.

So she had tidied up. She'd scooped up all the clothes that he had left lying on the floor, and his beer cans and dirty beer glasses – left after a bunch of his friends had come round to watch the footy – and dumped them down the rubbish chute in the corridor of their flat.

She was grinning in satisfaction at the memory as she indicated right, braked, then halted her car at the entrance to the underground car park beneath their apartment block in Brighton's Kemp Town. She pressed the clicker to open the electric gates.

Then, as she drove down the ramp, she was startled by a figure lurking in the darkness. She stamped her foot hard on the brake pedal.

# 2

**Thursday 11 December**

Within seconds of answering the phone to his fiancée, Jamie Ball sensed something was wrong.

The connection was bad as he drove his battered old VW Golf down the M23 towards Brighton in the heavy rush-hour traffic and pelting rain, and it was hard to hear what she was saying; but even through the crackly line, he could hear the unease in her voice.

‘Are you OK, darling?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said. ‘No, I’m not.’

‘What is it?’

‘There’s a man down here in the car park. I just saw him. He tried to hide as I drove in.’

Neither of them liked that underground car park beneath their apartment block. Their small ninth-floor flat, close to Brighton’s Royal Sussex County Hospital in Kemp Town, had views to die for, across the rooftops and far out into the English Channel, but the car park always gave them the creeps.

It was poorly lit with many totally dark areas, and there was only minimal security. Several vehicles lay beneath dust sheets and never appeared to be moved. Sometimes, when he drove down there, Jamie felt he was entering a mausoleum. If Logan arrived home on her own late at night, she preferred to park on the street and risk a ticket in the morning rather than go down there in the dark.

He had repeatedly warned Logan to make sure the electronic gates had closed behind her before driving on down the ramp. Now the scenario he had always feared seemed to be happening.

‘OK, darling,’ he said. ‘Listen to me. Lock your doors, turn around, and drive straight back out.’

She did not reply.

**PETER JAMES**

'Logan, did you hear me?'  
He heard her scream.  
A terrible scream.  
Then silence.

# 3

Thursday 11 December

Felix is fine with the fact that I kill people. He gets it, he understands my reasons. I have a sneaking feeling he'd like to do the same himself, if he had more courage. Harrison's not so sure about the whole moral issue here. As for Marcus – well, really he's dead against it – no pun intended. He thinks I'm a bad person. But hey, it's good to have smart friends who have opinions, and aren't afraid to express them. Personally, I've always respected people who speak their mind.

They say a true friend is someone who knows everything about you, and still likes you, but I would question that *unconditional* aspect of friendship. We need friends to keep checks and balances on us, to help each of us keep our perspectives, our moral compass. But I have to say that Marcus is wrong. I'm not really a bad person, I'm just a victim. All of us in life, all of us are victims. We're all prisoners of our past, in some form. Our past defines us in ways that are not always obvious. It's only later, on occasions, when you read something that touches a nerve, or your therapist points out some connection you had never made. That's when you have the *light-bulb* moment. When suddenly it all makes sense. And you can justify everything.

I've just started my next *project*. She's a young lady in her mid-twenties, slim, pretty, with long brown hair – the way I like all my *projects* to look. I've been following her for the past three months – from a distance mostly, but also on her Facebook page and through her tweets. I like to make a thorough study of my projects, working out the best way to take them, then thinking about what I'm going to do with them. It's the anticipation that really gives me the bang. It's like going online and looking at the menu of some great restaurant I plan to eat in. My beautiful dossiers.

Logan is quite a girl. She's fit, in every sense. Runs marathons, was

## **PETER JAMES**

due to get married, though that's not going to happen now – and that's nothing to do with me. But that all helps me, navigating by my moral compass. She can't treat men the way she has.

She needs punishing.

# 4

## Thursday 11 December

In summer, Hove Lagoon, a children's park and playground with two large boating ponds, a skate park and a children's paddling pool, behind the seafront promenade lined with gaily painted beach huts, would be teeming with people. Children, under the watchful eyes of mothers, grandparents, au pairs or nannies, would be playing on the roundabouts, slides and swings, or in the little pool, or sailing their toy boats on one of the two rectangular ponds that gave the place its name, and which they shared with learner dinghy sailors, windsurfers and wakeboarders.

Many would be stuffing their faces with ice creams or sweets purchased from the Big Beach Café, its utilitarian whitewashed walls, blue windows and steeply pitched roof belying its uber-cool cocktail bar and diner interior – the inspiration of its latest owner, Big Beat musician Norman Cook, aka Fatboy Slim.

But in the gloom of this foul December Thursday afternoon, with cold rain pelting down, and a strong, gusting wind, the whole place was forlorn and cheerless. A solitary elderly lady, in a see-through sou'wester, walked a reluctant dog, the size of a large rat, on a lead attached to a harness.

A group of workmen in fluorescent jackets, hard hats and ear defenders, working overtime beneath floodlights, were drilling open the path in front of the café. One, the foreman, stood away from the group, head bowed against the weather, holding up a tablet in a waterproof case, taking measurements and tapping them in. A cluster of cars and a van were parked nearby, as well as a noisy, yellow mobile generator.

As his drill bit broke through a fresh strip, and he levered it out of the way, one workman suddenly shouted out, in a foreign accent,



## PETER JAMES

'Oh God! Look!' He turned anxiously towards the foreman. 'Wesley! Look!'

Hearing his cry above the din of their machines, all the other workmen stopped, too. The foreman stepped forward and peered down, and saw what looked to his untrained eye like a skeletal hand.

'Is it an animal?' asked the workman.

'Dunno,' the foreman said dubiously. Nor could he tell how old it was. It could have been there decades. But he couldn't think of any animal that had a paw or claw like this. Except a monkey, possibly. It looked human, he thought. He instructed all three men with the drills to concentrate on the immediate area around the hand, and to be careful not to drill deeper than necessary.

More chunks of the black asphalt were levered away and a skeletal arm appeared, attached to the hand by black tendrils of sinew. Then part of a rib cage and what was, unmistakably, a human skull.

'OK!' the foreman said nervously. 'Everyone stop now. Go home and we start again in the morning, if we are permitted. See you all at 8 a.m.'

Wondering whether he should have stopped the men sooner, he went over to the van, opened the rear doors, then climbed in, rummaged around, and pulled out a tarpaulin. He laid it over the exposed parts of the skeleton, weighing it down with chunks of rubble. When he had finished, he unholstered his phone and dialled his boss, to ask for instructions. They came back loud and clear.

He ended the call, then, as he'd been told, immediately dialled 999. When the operator answered, he asked for the police.

# 5

**Thursday 11 December**

Shaking with fear, Jamie Ball pulled his Golf over onto the hard shoulder of the motorway, halted, and dialled Logan's number again. The phone rang, six times, and then he heard her voicemail message.

'Hi, this is Logan Somerville. I can't take your call right—'

He ended the call and immediately redialled. *Answer, darling Logan, answer, please answer, please answer!* Again it rang six times and her message started up. A lorry thundered past, inches from his little car, shaking it and spattering it with spray. He closed his eyes, thinking, feeling close to tears. He could call the caretaker, Mark. Or their next-door neighbour who had a key to their flat.

But he had heard her scream.

Something had happened.

His car shook again as another juggernaut thundered by, far too close.

He ended the call and immediately dialled 999.

# 6

**Thursday 11 December**

Some idiot, an hour or so ago, had mentioned the Q word. Just as in the theatre world, where there was a deep superstition about mentioning the name of the play *Macbeth* – all thespians only ever referred to it as ‘the Scottish play’ – so in the police world it was considered a jinx to say that a day was *quiet*. And sure enough, within minutes of the tubby, fully kitted constable breezing into the Communications Department of Sussex Police Headquarters to have a word with his wife, who was one of the radio controllers, and letting slip that Q word, it had all started kicking off, it seemed, right across the county. There was a sudden spate of three separate, serious road traffic collisions; an armed robbery in Brighton; a man threatening to jump off the notorious suicide beauty spot, Beachy Head; and a missing four-year-old boy in Crawley.

The Comms Department, which was housed in a very large, open-plan room on the first floor of a modern block on the sprawling HQ campus, handled all emergency calls made to Sussex Police throughout the county, and housed the CCTV system. It was presided over by Ops-1 – the call sign for the Duty Inspector in charge. Among the responsibilities of these inspectors was the granting of authority for use of firearms in a spontaneous incident, and running and controlling any vehicle pursuit in the county.

This afternoon and evening’s Ops-1 was Andy Kille, a tall, strongly built, former British parachuting champion, in his early fifties, with a handsome face, etched cynical from almost thirty years of police service, and topped with a thin fuzz of close-cropped greying hair. Dressed in uniform dark trousers and a short-sleeved black top, with ‘Police’ embroidered in white on the sleeves, his inspector pips on his epaulettes and his ID card hanging from his neck on a blue lanyard,

## YOU ARE DEAD

he currently sported a substantial and uncharacteristic pot belly – the result of recently having given up smoking and compensating by binge eating.

Kille sat at his desk in a cubicle-like space at the rear of the room, surrounded by an array of computer screens and monitors. One displayed a map of the county. Another constantly updated him on all the incidents currently running. A third, with a touch-screen, operated as his eyes and ears on the department he presided over.

On the wall at the far end of the room were monitors that displayed the performance statistics, whilst over his desk a separate screen showed images from four of the five hundred CCTV cameras around the county, as well as monitors displaying the current news. With the aid of his different and separate keyboards and a toggle lever, Kille could rotate and zoom any of the cameras within seconds. Thirty people worked in this section, most of them civilians, identified by the white embroidered words 'Police Support' on their sleeves, and royal blue polo shirts as opposed to the black ones of the police. Several were former police officers. At busy times there could be the best part of one hundred people working over the two levels.

At a row of desks beneath the CCTV cameras sat the radio operators; each, like almost everyone else in the room, wearing a headset. These were the people who liaised with the police officers who had been dispatched, both in vehicles and on foot. Most radio operators had a CCTV screen for the cameras on their particular area, when needed. Alongside them sat the emergency-call handlers. Emergency – 999 – calls were signalled by a low klaxon, so that in the rare instances all the call handlers were occupied, others in the room, also trained, would be alerted to answer.

Amy Wood, a placid, motherly, dark-haired woman, had twenty years of service answering emergency calls, and was one of the most experienced in the room. She loved this job, because you never knew what might happen in just ten seconds' time. And if there was one thing, above all else, she had learned, it was that whenever you thought you'd seen it all, you were always going to be in for another surprise. She never cared for Q days so she was always secretly glad when things kicked off. And how, in the past hour! She had answered calls from witnesses to two different road traffic accidents, a man

## PETER JAMES

whose girlfriend had been bitten by a neighbour's dog, someone in Bognor Regis who had just been dragged off his bicycle and seen it ridden away, and someone, who sounded off his face on drugs, complaining that a neighbour across the street kept photographing him.

The bane of her and her colleagues' work was the constant stream of hoax calls, and the even larger volume of calls from mentally ill people, around the clock. One particular elderly lady with dementia called fifteen times a day. It was a fact that twenty per cent of all 999 calls for immediate police response were mental health issues.

She had one on the line right now. A young man, crying.

'I'm going to kill myself.'

His hysterical voice was barely audible above the crackling roar of wind.

'Can you tell me where you are?' He was phoning from a mobile phone, and the location of the cell tower receiving and transmitting his signal showed up on her screen. It was in the town of Hastings and he could have been in any of a dozen streets.

'I don't think you can help me,' he said. 'I've got problems in my head.'

'Where are you?' she asked him calmly and pleasantly.

'Rigger Road,' he said and began blubbing. 'No one understands me, yeah?'

As she spoke she was typing out a running incident log and instructions to a radio dispatcher.

'Can you tell me your name?'

There was a long silence. She heard what sounded like *Dan*. 'Is your name Dan?'

'No, Ben.'

The whole tone of his voice was worrying her. She completed her instructions with Grade One, which meant immediate response – and to be there within a maximum of fifteen minutes.

'So what's been happening this week to make you feel like this, Ben?'

'I've just never fitted in. I can't tell my mum what's wrong. I'm from Senegal. Came when I was ten. I've just never fitted in. People treat me different. I've got a knife, I'm going to cut my throat now.'

## YOU ARE DEAD

‘Please stay on the line for me, Ben, I have someone on their way to you. I’m staying on the line with you until they get to you.’

A reply flashed back on her screen with the call sign of a police response car that had been allocated. She could see on the map the pink symbol of the police car, no more than half a mile from Rigger Road. The car suddenly jumped two blocks nearer.

‘Why do people treat me different?’ He began crying hysterically. ‘Please help me.’

‘Officers are very close, Ben. I’ll stay on the line until they get to you.’ She could see the pink symbol entering Rigger Road. ‘Can you see a police car? Can you see a police car, Ben?’

‘Yrrrr.’

‘Will you wave at it?’

She heard voices. Then the message she was relieved to see flashed up: *Officers at scene.*

Job done, she ended the call. It was always hard to tell whether would-be suicide calls were real or a cry for help, and neither she, nor any of the others here, would ever take a risk on a call like this one. A week ago she’d taken a call from a man who said he had a rope round his neck and was going to jump through his loft hatch. Just as the police entered his house, she heard him gurgling, and then the chilling sound of the officers shouting to each other for a knife.

Amy looked at her watch. 5.45. Not halfway through her twelve-hour shift yet, but time to grab a cuppa, and see how many others in the department fancied ordering in a curry tonight from a local, rather good balti house, which was fast turning into their latest canteen. But before she could remove her headset and stand up, her phone rang.

‘Sussex Police emergency, how can I help?’ she answered, and immediately looked at the number and approximate location that showed on the screen. It was in the Crawley area, close to Gatwick Airport. She guessed from the traffic noise the caller was on a motorway. An RTC, she anticipated – most calls from motorways were either reporting debris lying in one of the lanes, or else road traffic collisions.

As was so often the case, at first the young man seemed to have problems getting his words out. From her long experience, Amy knew

## PETER JAMES

that for most people the mere act of phoning 999 was nerve-wracking, let alone the effect that the emergency they were phoning to report was having on them. Half the people who called were in some kind of 'red mist' of nerves and confusion.

She could barely hear the man's voice above the roar of the traffic. 'I just phoned her you see – look – the thing is – I'm really worried about my fiancée,' he stuttered, finally.

'May I have your name and number, caller?' she asked, although she could see his number already.

He blurted them out. 'I think my fiancée is in trouble. I was just on the phone to her as she was driving into the underground car park beneath our flat. She said there was a man lurking in there, he scared her, then I heard her scream and the phone went dead.'

'Have you tried calling her again, sir?'

'Yes, yes, I have. Please send someone over there, I'm really worried.'

All Amy's experience and instincts told her this was real and potentially serious. 'What is your name, please?'

'Jamie – Jamie Ball.'

Despite the background roar he now spoke more clearly. Once again she was typing as she spoke. 'Can you give me the address, her name, and a brief description of your fiancée.'

He gave them to her, then added, 'Please, please can you get someone there quickly, something's not right.'

She looked at her screen then at the map, searching for the pink car symbol, then spotted it. 'Officers are being dispatched now, sir.'

'Thank you. Thank you so much.'

She could hear his voice cracking. 'Please stay on the line for a moment, sir. Sir. Mr Ball? Jamie. My name is Amy.'

'I'm sorry,' he said, sounding more composed.

'Can you please give me your fiancée's mobile and home phone numbers and car registration number?'

Ball gave the details, but suddenly could not remember the entire registration number. 'It begins GU10,' he said. 'Please ask them to hurry.'

'Do you have any idea who the person in the car park might be?'

## YOU ARE DEAD

Have you or your fiancée seen anyone suspicious in the car park before?’

‘No. No. But it’s dark down there and there’s no security. Some vehicles were vandalized there a few months ago. I’m on my way home now, but I’m a good half an hour away.’

‘Officers will be there in minutes, sir.’

‘Please make sure she’s OK. Please. I love her. Please make sure she’s all right. Please.’

‘I’m giving the officers attending your mobile number, sir. They’ll contact you.’

‘I heard her scream,’ he said. ‘Oh God, I heard her scream. It was terrible. They’ve got to help her.’

She typed the details out and sent them by FLUM – a flash unsolicited message – to Andy Kille.

He immediately alerted the Duty Force Gold commander, Chief Superintendent Nev Kemp, and the duty Critical Incident Manager, formerly known as the Silver Commander, Chief Inspector Jason Tingley, that they had a potential abduction.



# 7

## Thursday 11 December

'PC Rain', officers called this kind of weather, only partially in jest. Scrotes didn't like getting wet, and accordingly the crime levels almost always went down in the city of Brighton and Hove whenever there was heavy rain.

Six o'clock on a dark, chilly Thursday evening in December. PC Susi Holliday, with her crew mate, the older and more experienced PC Richard Kyrke, known as RVK, and famed within the police for his photographic memory, were heading west along Hove seafront in their Ford Mondeo estate patrol car. They were passing a succession of handsome Regency terraces to their right, and the deserted lawns, with rows of beach huts, to their left. Further away, beyond the throw of the promenade street lighting, the stormy water of the English Channel tossed and foamed.

They were approaching the end of their shift, with just an hour till the 7 p.m. changeover, and it had been a quiet day. So far they'd attended a minor RTC – a rider knocked off his motor scooter by a van, but without any injury – a call to a chemist near the Seven Dials roundabout, where a man had collapsed in the doorway, from a suspected drug overdose; and, as there was almost without fail on every shift, a call to a domestic incident, which they had sorted, and arrested the live-in boyfriend. It was the fourth time the woman had called the police after being assaulted by this man in the past eighteen months. Perhaps now she would throw him out for good, but Susi Holliday doubted it. The true tragedy for many victims of domestic abuse was that they became so demoralized, losing all their confidence, that they rarely had the courage to chuck their partner out or to leave – or the ability to believe they could make a life on their own.

In a few hours, the downtown area around West Street with its

## YOU ARE DEAD

bars and nightclubs would, inevitably, turn into a potential war zone as it did every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, kept mostly under rigid but friendly control through Operation Marble, a massive police presence late into the night. But luckily, on their current shift pattern, they would escape these nights of dealing with constant fights and with drunk, abusive chavs. Although, in truth, some officers enjoyed getting in a good ‘bundle’, as they called it – it was one of the adrenaline rushes of the job.

Susi Holliday was driving in the stop-start traffic, the wipers struggling to clout away the rain, the brake lights of the car in front flaring against their rain-soaked windscreen. RVK was engrossed in a text he was sending. They were both off for the next two days and Susi was looking forward to a quiet time with her husband James, shopping for stuff for the new flat they had recently moved into in nearby Eastbourne, where the property prices were substantially lower than Brighton.

‘What are your plans for your days off, RVK?’ she asked her colleague.

‘Uh,’ he said, and raised a finger, signalling he needed to finish his texting task. After a moment he said, ‘Taking Joey to the football.’ Joey was his twelve-year-old son, whom he doted on. ‘Then we’re going to the outlaws after. You?’

Their radios crackled. Then they heard the female voice of a Resource Room supervisor.

‘Charlie Romeo Four?’

RVK answered. ‘Charlie Romeo Four.’

‘Charlie Romeo Four, we have a report of an incident in the underground car park of the Chesham Gate flats, at the corner of Stanley Rise and Briars Avenue. A woman may have been attacked by an intruder. Can you attend? Grade One.’

‘Chesham Gate?’ Kyrke replied. ‘Yes, yes. We’re on our way.’ Then he turned to Susi. ‘Spin her round.’

Susi Holliday switched on the blue lights and siren and, adrenaline pumping, made a U-turn straight out into the opposite lane and accelerated. Like most of her colleagues, she always got a massive buzz out of responding to a Grade One ‘shout’. Along with getting in a ‘bundle’, driving on blues and twos was one of the great kicks – and

## PETER JAMES

perks – of the job. And a big responsibility. The lights and siren were, in law, a request to be allowed through, not an automatic right. And with what seemed like half of all drivers on the road either deaf, blind or just plain stupid, all blue-light runs were fraught with hazards and heart-in-the-mouth moments.

She had one now as a Nissan Micra in front, with apparently no rear-view mirrors or indicators, suddenly switched lanes right into her path as she bore down on it at over 60 mph. ‘Asshole!’ she hissed, missing its rear bumper by inches and undertaking it.

As she drove, Constable Kyrke was taking down details from the supervisor, who read out the make and partial index of the woman’s car and a description of her.

Ninety seconds later they tore over the roundabout by Brighton Pier, thanks to an intelligent bus driver stopping for them, and on up Marine Parade. They made a left, blazing up past the bed-and-breakfast hotels of Lower Rock Gardens. Less than two minutes later, driving up the steep hill before the hospital, they saw the apartment block, Chesham Gate, ahead to their left.

They pulled up beside the closed entrance to the underground car park, climbed out and walked up to the full-height gates. They peered through the bars of the grille into the darkness below. Susi Holliday took out her torch, switched it on and shone the beam through, but could see little other than a row of parked cars, some beneath fitted covers.

‘Any idea how we get in?’ she asked her colleague.

‘I’ll see if there’s a caretaker’s flat,’ he said, and sprinted off towards the main entrance. Suddenly she heard a clank, and the gates began to open. Moments later, she was lit up by the glare of headlights, and heard the roar of an engine behind her. She turned to see a small BMW convertible, driven by a young woman. Raising her arm, she walked towards it and told the driver she wouldn’t be able to enter the car park at this time because of a police incident.

She hurried down the ramp, triggering the automatic lights, and could now see much of the interior, switching her torch off to conserve the battery. She was looking for a white Fiat 500, index beginning GU10, and a slim woman in her mid-twenties with long brown hair.

## YOU ARE DEAD

There were about sixty or so parking spaces, most of them occupied, as well as several motorcycles and a cycle rack.

But there was no sign of life. She began working her way along the rows of parked cars, breathing in the smells of dust and engine oil, and all the time keeping a wary eye out for anyone else who might be down there.

She reached the end of the row and turned left, towards a darker section. One light above her flickered intermittently, emitting a loud buzz, and she switched her torch back on. She passed a bike rack, with several heavily padlocked bicycles, and a beautiful old convertible Mercedes, caked in dust and sitting on four flat tyres. Then she saw, neatly parked, a white Fiat 500. The first digits of its index were GU10. The car looked wet, as if it had only recently been driven in here.

She stopped and radioed her colleague. 'I think I've found the car,' she said.

'I'm on my way down with the caretaker,' he responded.

She approached the car cautiously, then shone her torch beam in through the side window. The interior was empty. A discarded chewing-gum wrapper lay on the passenger seat, and there was a ticket sitting on the dash. She looked at it closely and saw it was a pay and display from a car park in nearby Lewes. She checked both driver and passenger doors but they were locked. The car bonnet was warm.

Just then, PC Kyrke appeared, accompanied by a short man in his fifties wearing chinos and a fabric bomber jacket and holding a mobile phone.

'This is Mark Schulz, the caretaker for this block,' he said.

'So what exactly is the problem?' the caretaker asked.

'We need to ensure the owner of this car, Ms Logan Somerville, is safe,' she said. 'Have you seen her since she arrived back?'

He shook his head. 'No, I finish at half past five.'

'Do you have CCTV here?'

He raised his hands with a gesture of despair. 'It's not been working for six weeks. I told the management company, but nothing happens.' He shrugged. 'What can you do, eh?' Then he hesitated as they walked towards the stairs. 'Shall I phone her?'

'Yes, please.'

## PETER JAMES

‘Very nice lady,’ he said. ‘Nice boyfriend. Nice people.’ He held his phone up, scrolled through the display, then dialled. After some moments he looked at the two officers and shook his head. ‘No answer.’

‘Do you have a key to her flat?’

‘Yes, give me a few moments to find it.’

‘I’ll stay down here and have a look around, and stop anyone else from entering or leaving,’ Kyrke said. ‘You go up to the flat.’

Susi Holliday went up the internal staircase to the ground floor, then waited in the corridor while Schulz went into his flat. He came back out holding a bunch of keys, like a gaoler, and led her into the lift.

At the ninth floor they stepped out into a gloomy corridor with a badly worn carpet and a musty smell. Somewhere, music was pounding out insanely loudly. Susi Holliday recognized it as ‘Patient Love’ by Passenger. She followed the caretaker along the corridor, till he stopped outside a door and pressed the bell.

After some moments he rang again. Then he knocked hard. He waited several seconds then looked quizzically at the police officer. ‘No answer.’

‘Could you open it so I can check if she is there?’

‘I don’t really like to go in, you know?’

‘We’re very concerned for her safety – we need to know if she is all right.’

He shrugged. ‘OK, sure, no problem.’

He opened the door and called out, ‘Hello! Miss Somerville! Hello, it’s the caretaker! I have the police with me.’

They were greeted with silence. The place had a deadened, empty feeling.

‘Do you mind if we go in?’ PC Holliday asked.

He rolled his mouth pensively, then gestured with his hand. ‘No, do go in.’

They entered a small hallway, with two mountain bikes leaning against the wall and a cluster of coats and anoraks hung above them, and then walked through into a bright, airy but untidy living/dining room. It had a modern feel, with a cream carpet, beige sofas, and a breakfast bar dividing the room from the small kitchen, on which lay

## YOU ARE DEAD

a copy of the *Independent* newspaper and *The Week* magazine. At the rear of the bar was a tropical fish tank, immaculately clean and brightly illuminated, with several tiny fish swimming around.

There were a number of framed photographs, which Susi Holliday looked at with interest. One showed a good-looking young couple, both in cycling gear, posing with muddy bikes against a rugged, mountainous landscape. Another was of the same couple lying on a beach, looking up and grinning at the photographer. Another showed them in ski gear. There were several large, colourful abstract prints depicting deckchairs on the beach, the skeletal remains of the old West Pier and a row of beach huts, and a spaniel which looked like it was by an artist she really liked, a Lewes-based painter called Tom Homewood.

They checked the bedroom, which contained a double bed with a neatly folded duvet and plumped pillows, a television and a table with a lamp either side of the bed. A stack of books lay on one table and a woman's magazine and a partially empty water glass on the other. Susi Holliday noted a boot lying on the floor, and then saw what looked like a small bloodstain at the bottom of the en-suite bathroom door, and some tiny drops on the floor.

The bathroom was tidy and dry, with a wicker laundry basket, on top of which lay Lycra cycling shorts and a vest. The shelves were lined with shower gel, shampoo, body cream and other unguents, male and female razors and several bottles of perfume, cologne and aftershave. It seemed as though no one had been here for a few hours, at the very least.

Susi Holliday radioed in her report, and stated that whilst there was no sign of a struggle, she had seen a small amount of blood.

The controller told them that the woman's fiancé was now just minutes away and to wait at the scene.

# 8

**Thursday 11 December**

Jamie Ball, normally a careful driver, tore like a man possessed along Edward Street, peering through the windscreen blurred by the pelting rain, weaving in and out of the heavy rush-hour traffic, flashing his lights and hooting, and ignoring the angry horns and waved fists that came back at him. His entire body was pulsing with fear.

A speed camera flashed him and he didn't care. He was oblivious to everything but the desperate need to get home, to make sure Logan was OK. He turned sharp left, the car skidding on the wet surface, the tyres juddering for traction as he accelerated up the hill, then made a right into their street. Ahead he saw a police patrol car parked close to the entrance to their apartment block.

He pressed the clicker, waited impatiently for the electronic gates to swing open, then started to drive down the ramp. Almost straight away he was stopped by a uniformed police officer who ran up out of the car park. He identified himself and was directed into an empty bay.

Immediately he jumped out of the car, leaving the door open, and to his immense relief saw her little white Fiat neatly parked in its usual space. She was OK! Thank God, thank God! Then he turned to the police officer and asked, 'Where's Logan, my fiancée, what's happened? Is she OK?'

'I think it would be best if you go and speak to my colleague who's gone up with the caretaker.'

He felt a sudden chill of fear. 'Why? What's happened?'

'They'll be able to update you upstairs, sir.'

Jamie raced along to the lift, and rode it up to the ninth floor. As the doors opened he stepped out, and saw a uniformed police officer, accompanied by Mark, the caretaker, emerging from their flat.

## YOU ARE DEAD

'Hi!' he called out. 'Is everything OK?'

'Hello Jamie!' the caretaker greeted him.

'Logan? Is she OK, Mark? She phoned me – she said she saw an intruder in the car park.'

'I haven't seen her,' Mark said. 'She's not home yet, Jamie.'

'Yes she is, her car's downstairs!' He looked at the police officer, ignored her quizzical stare and eased his way past her and into the flat. He strode down the hallway, past their mountain bikes leaning against the wall, turned left into the small anteroom which they had lined floor-to-ceiling with bookshelves, housing his entire collection of Lee Child novels and many of their other favourite crime, horror and sci-fi writers, and into the large, untidy, square living/dining room. No sign of her.

'Logan!' he called, hurrying back into the hallway. He checked their bedroom, the boot Logan had tripped over earlier still lying by the bed, the en-suite bathroom, the tiny guest bedroom, the kitchen, the guest loo and shower room. He went back into the living/dining room and opened the door to the small balcony. Sometimes she went out there for a cigarette, despite his attempts at getting her to quit. But the two plastic chairs and little white table sat there, forlornly drenched in the rain, the soggy stub of a cigarette lying in the ashtray in a pool of water.

He stepped back into the living room and closed the door against the elements. The police officer had returned, with the caretaker standing behind her. 'I'm PC Holliday,' she said. 'My colleague and I attended at the underground car park of this building following your call, earlier. So far we haven't found anything suspicious – Logan's Fiat is parked and locked in its allocated space downstairs, and there's no sign of any disturbance in your flat.'

'She phoned me from the car park as she drove in. Then she screamed, and her phone went dead.'

'Have you tried her again, sir?'

'Yes, I've been calling her constantly all my way here.' He tugged his phone out of his trouser pocket and dialled her number again. Six rings and it went to voicemail. 'Darling,' he said. 'Call me, please, as soon as you pick this up, I'm really worried.' He ended the call and looked back at Susi Holliday. 'She always calls me back within



## PETER JAMES

minutes. It doesn't matter what she's doing – she always calls me back – and I always call her back.'

'She definitely drove to work herself, sir? She didn't get a lift from a colleague, which could explain why her car is here?'

'No, for God's sake! She called me from her car, down in the car park. She said she'd seen a man down there and screamed. It was a terrible sound. It wasn't like her. Can we go back down to the car park and take a look?' Jamie pleaded.

The officer's radio crackled. Jamie heard a disembodied female voice say something he couldn't discern.

'Charlie Romeo Four,' Susi Holliday answered. 'We're still attending at Chesham Gate.'

'Thank you, Charlie Romeo Four. Let me know when you stand down.'

'Yes, yes,' she replied. Then she turned to Jamie Ball.

'Did you and your fiancée have any kind of an argument today, sir?' Susi Holliday asked.

'Argument? No, why?'

'I noticed blood on the bottom of your bathroom door, earlier.'

'Oh, that. She tripped getting out of bed and gashed her toe on it. She was going to go to the hospital this morning to get it looked at.'

'The hospital would be able to verify that, would they, sir?'

'Yes, of course.' Then Jamie Ball hesitated and stared at the officer. 'Oh God, you think I did something to her? For Christ's sake!'

'I'm afraid we have to ask these questions, sir.'

Jamie grabbed the spare keys to Logan's car and then they took the lift back down to the car park to join Kyrke, and the three of them headed over to the Fiat.

'One thing I should add,' Ball said, 'is that Logan's diabetic. She's Type-2 – needs to keep her sugar levels up, otherwise she can risk a hypo.'

The officer nodded. 'Where do you work, Mr Ball?'

'In Croydon, Condor pet foods.'

'We've got two Rhodesian Ridgebacks,' PC Kyrke said, walking over and joining them. 'The wife swears by Condor – *Condor Vitalife*.'

'Good to hear that,' Jamie said, without enthusiasm. 'It's an excellent product.'

## YOU ARE DEAD

'Better than raw meat?'

He shrugged. 'From what I know it's more of a balanced diet than raw meat.'

They reached the Fiat.

'She was down here when she called you?' PC Holliday asked. She held up her iPhone. 'It's a very poor signal.'

Jamie nodded. He pulled out his phone again. The signal veered from one dot, to zero, to two. He dialled Logan's number again, and moments later heard it ringing. Very faintly.

They all could.

For an instant, the caretaker and two officers looked at him. Frowning, he fumbled with the key then opened the car door. Instantly the ringing was louder.

Her phone was lying in the footwell almost under the passenger seat.

He started to lean across to pick it up, but was held back by PC Holliday, who reached past him with a gloved hand. The ringing stopped. Holliday knew that recovered phones were normally retained for forensic digital evidence, but as a life was potentially at risk she decided to check the phone immediately. She held it up and asked him for the code, which he gave her. She tapped it in and stared at the display, and saw nine missed calls from 'Jamie Mob'. She asked if it was him and he confirmed it was.

He looked at the two police officers. 'She'd never – she'd never leave her phone. She wouldn't go anywhere without it.'

But although he could see sympathy in their expressions, he could also see they were a tad sceptical.

'I'm afraid all of us leave our phones behind sometimes,' PC Holliday said. 'Done it myself.'

'Me too,' the caretaker chipped in. 'I couldn't find the thing for two days.'

'Something's happened to her. Please believe me. Something's happened. I heard her scream, for God's sake!'

Their radios crackled again and once more he heard a female voice.

'Charlie Romeo Four,' PC Kyrke said, tilting his head and speaking down into the radio clipped to the left of his chest.

## PETER JAMES

'Serious RTC at the A23–A27 junction. RPU need some assistance. Can you advise me when you're free to attend, Charlie Romeo Four?'

'Yes, yes,' Kyrke said. 'But I think we're going to be a while.' Then he turned to Jamie Ball. 'Excuse me being personal, sir, but was everything all right between you and your fiancée? No arguments or anything like that?'

'Nothing. We've bickered like every couple, but we've never had a real argument in all the time we've been together. We love each other so much.'

Susi Holliday stepped away from the others, feeling increasingly concerned about what she had heard. She radioed Control and requested that the Duty Inspector attend urgently.