

**JAMES  
PATTERSON**

& MICHAEL WHITE



**PRIVATE**

DOWN UNDER

KIDNAP, MURDER, BLACKMAIL.

PRIVATE SYDNEY IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

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Author's Note

Copyright

## About the Book

P.I. Craig Gisto, head of the latest branch of Private, is enjoying the glamorous launch party with his new team when their celebrations are interrupted by the bloodied arrival of a boy with his eyes gouged out.

The boy is the kidnapped son of one of Australia's richest men - but investigating his death isn't their only pressing case. The rock star Micky Stevens is convinced someone's trying to kill him, and believes Private are the only ones who can help.

As if that wasn't enough, someone is murdering the wealthy wives of the Eastern suburbs, in the most brutal way imaginable. And if they don't catch the killer soon, the next victim could be someone close to Private ...



## About the Author

**JAMES PATTERSON** is one of the best-known and biggest-selling writers of all time. He is the author of some of the most popular series of the past decade - the Alex Cross, Women's Murder Club and Detective Michael Bennett novels - and he has written many other number one bestsellers including romance novels and stand-alone thrillers. He lives in Florida with his wife and son.

James is passionate about encouraging children to read. Inspired by his own son who was a reluctant reader, he also writes a range of books specifically for young readers. James has formed a partnership with the National Literacy Trust, an independent, UK-based charity that changes lives through literacy. In 2010, he was voted Author of the Year at the Children's Choice Book Awards in New York.

Find out more at [www.jamespatterson.co.uk](http://www.jamespatterson.co.uk)

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DOWN UNDER



CENTURY

## Prologue

I'D SEEN PICTURES of Justine Smith, Jack Morgan's No. 2 at Private LA, but she was far more beautiful in the flesh.

I stood at Sydney Airport International Arrivals and watched her waft out of customs with a trolley looking like she was ready for a model shoot - no clue she'd just been on a 14-hour flight. She was here to launch the latest branch of the Private franchise created by Jack Morgan in LA - a top-notch investigative agency for top-notch people.

I held back, let her family greet her first. There was her sister, Greta, and husband, my new buddy, Brett Thorogood, the Deputy Commissioner of New South Wales Police, their kids, Nikki, eight and Serge, ten. Then I stepped forward, shook her hand.

I'd parked my Ferrari 458 Spider in the pick-up zone. The Thorogoods headed off after we'd all synchronized watches for the launch party tonight and we were off, pulling out of the airport and onto the sun-drenched freeway.

None of us could have known what a fuck of a week we were about to have.

# Chapter 1

---

HE CAN SEE nothing.

He can hear nothing.

He runs, gasping, hits a hard object – face first. His nose shatters, sending a cascade of agony through his head and down his spine. Falls back, slams to the floor. His head cracking on concrete. More pain.

He can see nothing.

He can hear nothing.

The sack hood over his head stinks of sweat and blood. He tries to loosen the ties, but it's no good.

He vomits, it hits the fabric, splashes on his face.

He thinks he'll choke and part of him doesn't care, wants it. But the survival genes kick in and he panics, pulls up, the spew running down his shirt front. He reaches out and touches the wall. Moves left as fast as he can. He feels the vibration of feet, people running toward him.

A burst of terrible agony in his back. Two thumps propel him to the wall. He smells fresh blood. He smells tire rubber. Another crunch, his thigh exploding. But he keeps to the wall, sweat running down his ruined face, blood drips from his nose, his leg, his back. He feels wet all over. He's a leaking sieve, his life draining away. The pain in his legs screams. The hood fabric sucks into his mouth.

He has to keep going. 'MOVE OR DIE ... MOVE OR DIE,' a voice bellows in his head. Shrapnel clips his ear. He screeches, feels his guts heave. Another bullet thunders past his head, but he doesn't hear it, just feels the air



tremble. Dust and concrete chips hit him in the face. His legs start to buckle, but he refuses to give in.

'MOVE OR DIE. MOVE OR DIE.'

He feels a door, pushes, stumbles through, trips, hits the concrete again. Blood splashes across the floor, up the walls. He pulls up once more.

He's on a roller coaster, at the park with Grandma. He's four years old. Then he's floating in space. No reference points.

He can see nothing.

He can hear nothing.

He senses the air tremble again.

He touches wood. Another door. It moves forward. He's falling ... and dies before he hits the ground.

## Chapter 2

---

I HEARD THE crash from the other side of the room and for a second I thought one of the hired caterers had screwed up. But then a woman screamed and I was dashing across reception.

I caught a glimpse of my right-hand woman, Mary Clarke, spin on her heel. She's a big, muscly girl but has the reaction time of Usain Bolt off the blocks.

I saw the blood first. A smear, then a dark pool spreading out across the marble. The man lay spread-eagled on the floor, face down, torn apart, gaping holes in his back, his right leg shattered, twisted obscenely under him. A hood over his head.

I crouched down as Justine Smith ran up.

Pulling a tissue from my pocket, I wrapped it around my fingers, turned the body over and tried to remove the hood, but it was tied fast. I glanced up to see Deputy Commissioner Thorogood.

"Jesus!" he said as he lowered beside me.

"Multiple gunshot wounds. Twice in the back, leg," I said and tilted the body so Thorogood could study the ragged circles in the guy's linen jacket.

Darlene, Private's tech guru, squatted down close to the body. She's usually in a lab coat over jeans, but tonight she was wearing a red cocktail dress that accentuated her incredible curves. She pulled on latex gloves, removed a sharp implement from her clutch purse. Leaning forward, she cut the ties of the hood and eased up the fabric.

"Holy Christ!" Thorogood exclaimed.

## Chapter 3

---

HIS EYES HAD been gouged out. There were two red craters in their place. The skin was jagged, blood oozing. A gray bundle of nerves snaked from the left socket and stuck to the skin of the man's cheek.

It was hard to tell for sure, but he looked like a young kid, maybe late teens, twenty tops. The rest of his face was smeared, his nose smashed to hell.

I heard Johnny Ishmah, the youngest of my team, behind me. I turned to him. "Johnny get everyone out." Then I saw Mary. "Come with me."

The Deputy Commissioner straightened and pulled out his cell as he walked away.

I heard him say "Inspector ..." His boys would be here in minutes.

"Well, not your average gatecrasher," I heard Darlene mumble as Mary and I headed for the door.

"Blood trail." I flicked a glance at the floor just beyond the door.

"Passage ahead leads to the garage," Mary responded.

There was a slew of blood across the concrete, up the walls. Picking our way round the puddles I leaned on the second door and we were out onto "Garage Level 1". Plenty of blood still, oval droplets on the rough concrete. The sort of splashes someone makes when they are running and bleeding at the same time.

The poor kid had stopped here, blood had pooled into a patch about two feet wide that was rippling away toward a drain in the floor. The trail led off to the left. Three cars

stood there, a Merc, a Prius and my black Spider. Tire marks close to the bend, more blood.

I bent down and picked up a shell casing, holding it in the tissue still in my hand.

“.357 Sig,” Mary said. She was ex-Military Police, knew a thing or two.

“Pros.”

“Must be cameras everywhere.” She glanced around.

“Small garage. There’s a guard at the gate. He has a security camera system.” I turned and led the way back. The road narrowed, a barrier twenty yards ahead. Next to that, a booth.

I could see immediately the place was hit. Glass everywhere, the guard slumped unconscious, a row of monitors an inch from his head. The cable to a hard drive dangling. Standard system ... record the garage for twelve-hour rotations on a terabyte hard drive. Wipe it, start again.

“Took the hard drive,” Mary said nodding at the lead.

I crouched down beside the guard and lifted his head gently. He stirred, pulled back and went for his gun. That had gone too.

“Whoa buddy!” Mary exclaimed, palms up.

The guy recognized me. “Mr. Gisto.” He ran a hand over his forehead. “Holy shit ...”

“Easy, pal.” I placed a hand on his shoulder. “Remember anything?”

He sighed. “Couple a guys in hoodies. It all happened so bloody quick ...”

“Alright,” I said, turning to Mary. There was a sudden movement beyond the booth window. A cop in a power stance, finger poised to the trigger.

A second later Deputy Commissioner Thorogood appeared in the doorway, touched the officer’s arm. “Put it down, constable.”

It was then I saw the third guy, standing next to Thorogood. Middle build, five-ten, hard, lived-in face. I recognized him immediately and felt a jolt of painful memories. Covered it well. I knew he instantly recognized me, but he pretended he hadn't. The devious son of a bitch.

## Chapter 4

---

A COP CAR pulled up to the gate, tires screeching. Close behind, a van, "FORENSICS" on the side.

Outside, Thorogood made the introductions. He seemed oblivious to the animosity in the air. "Craig Gisto and Mary Clarke, Private Sydney - a new investigative agency started by a friend of mine, Jack Morgan in LA. These guys head up the Sydney branch. Craig, Mary ... this is Inspector Mark Talbot, Sydney Local Area Command."

"And what are they doing here?" Talbot studied my face. I half-smiled back.

"We have an arrangement ..." Thorogood responded.

"Arrangement, sir?"

"Didn't you get my memo? We help Private, Private helps us ... Understand? So what do we have here, Craig?" the Deputy Commissioner turned to me.

"Lotta blood. Your forensics guys'll have fun. The hard drive for the security cameras walked." I flicked a glance toward the booth. "And I found this." I pulled the tissue from my jacket pocket and handed the bullet casing to Thorogood.

"That should have been left where you found it ..." Talbot remarked angrily.

".357 Sig." Thorogood ignored the Inspector. "Okay, so what do you want from us, Craig? Mary?"

"Give Darlene access to the crime scene and ten minutes with the body before it's taken to the morgue."

Thorogood nodded. "Fine."

“What!” Talbot exclaimed and glared at us. Then he saw Thorogood’s expression and shut up.

## Chapter 5

---

THE PARTY ROOM was almost empty. Most of the Police Forensics team were still down in the garage, dusting, photographing, videoing, gathering samples. The guard was en route to hospital. A single police scientist in a blue plastic boiler suit crouched beside the corpse. The man looked irritated.

I walked over. Darlene was on her knees, her face close to the dead kid's back. The forensics officer was holding a plastic sample bottle in one gloved hand, a pair of tweezers in the other. Beside him in a metal box lay half a dozen more sample bottles.

"She with you?" the guy asked without moving his head. "She's *really* pissing me off. This is a crime scene."

Darlene treated him as though he wasn't there.

"We have clearance to observe," I told him.

"I'll need that officially verified."

"No you won't," Darlene snapped. "But, if you insist, I'll have my good friend, Deputy Commissioner Thorogood, remind you ... Oh, and ..." She nodded toward the box of samples. "I'll need access to those too, please." She gave him a killer smile.



## Chapter 6

---

SUMMER RAIN HIT the windshield as I pulled the Ferrari out of the lot and headed for the North Shore. My mind was churning. Not only because of the dead kid at the drinks reception. My head was buzzing with just three words: "The Bastard's Back". Mark fucking Talbot had returned to Sydney and he was going to get right up my nose, just as Private starts in business. I punched the wheel in frustration, glared at the girders of the Harbour Bridge and the memories started up, couldn't stop 'em.

I'm twelve. My crack-head mom is burned to a crisp in the London project I grew up in. Poor little orphan Craig is shipped out to Sydney and Uncle Ben. Within a week, I go from a mildewed tenement in winter to a four-bedroomed house in Narrabeen and sunshine.

The Talbot family meet me at the airport and there's my cousin, Mark, giving me the sort of hostile look he's never lost. He obviously hates me straight off the bat.

Four years later, I'm alone doing my homework. Mark bursts into my room with a couple of mates. They've been drinking. They stink. I go to get up and Mark slams a fist in my face. One of his friends kicks me in the balls. I spit blood onto the carpet. They hear my uncle turn the key in the front door, run. I spend the next day under the covers pretending I have flu so Ben doesn't see my face until I can come up with an excuse.

Then sweet release. I'm eighteen and go to university to study Law. In my second year I join an exchange program with UCLA, spend a year in the States. It turns out to be

the best year of my life. I return home to Oz at Easter - it's the last thing I want.

Ben picks me up at the airport. We jump in the car.

"Mark's engaged," he says.

I look stunned.

"Why so surprised?"

I shake my head. "Nothing ... just. I didn't know he was even seeing anyone ..."

"All been a bit quick, I admit. Becky's a babe though. There's a party tonight."

Mark has changed, almost friendly. Amazing what love can do, I think. Then I see Becky and I understand. Love at first sight.

I still don't know how the fight started. I was chatting to Becky in the kitchen and Mark must have thought I was flirting with her - which maybe I was. He was drunk and abusive. He took a swing at me, and that was it. We crashed into the lounge, parting stunned guests like a knife through an engagement party cake. Would have killed each other if it hadn't been for Ben and three other guys pulling Mark and me apart.

When I'd recovered enough to see straight, I realized Becky had slipped away unnoticed.

The next day she called Mark to call off the engagement. It was to be five years before I saw her again.

## Chapter 7

---

DARLENE'S LAB STOOD along the corridor from where Private's launch party had been. It was her fiefdom. In here, she felt relaxed, isolated from the troubles of the outside world. Which was a little ironic, considering what was in the case she dumped on the counter.

She had designed the lab herself and been given carte blanche to install the best equipment available. Better still, through her contacts, she had some technology no one beyond Private would see for years to come. She was very proud of that.

Police forensics had worked through the night and catalogued everything before passing on the samples to Darlene an hour ago. A courier had delivered a case of test tubes and a USB at 6 am. She'd already been at Private for an hour.

She opened the clasps of the sample box and looked inside. Each test tube was labeled and itemized by date, location and type. They contained samples of the corpse's blood, scrapings from under his fingernails, individual hairs from his jacket. She had a collection of her own photographs and a file from the police photographer.

There was no ID on the body. The victim was male, Asian, between eighteen and twenty-one years old. Both eyes removed with a sharp instrument. Wasn't a professional job. By the condition of the wound, it was done at least thirty-six hours before death. Sockets were infected. He was a mess, his clothes badly soiled. They stank of sweat, urine and excrement. He'd probably been in them for days,

held captive some place. But the jacket he'd worn was expensive - Emporio Armani - and his hair had been well cut, maybe two weeks ago. He was obviously from a wealthy family.

So it seemed likely they were looking at kidnap, Darlene mused. Maybe the kid had escaped his captors. Maybe he'd stopped being useful. No way of knowing ... yet.

She removed a selection of test tubes from the case and walked over to a row of machines on an adjacent bench, each device glistening new. She slotted the test tubes into a metal rack, pulled up a stool, switched on the machines and listened to the ascending whir of computers booting up and electron microscopes coming on-line.

The first test tube was labeled: "Nail Scraping. Left *digitus secundus manus.*" With the tweezers, she slid out the piece of material. It was a couple of millimeters square, a blob of blue and pink. She placed it on a slide, lowered a second rectangular piece of glass over it and positioned the arrangement in the cross-hairs of the microscope.

The image was a pitted off-white. Set to a magnification of x1000, human flesh looked like a blanched moonscape. She tracked the microscope to the right and refocused. It looked almost the same, only the details were different. She set the tracking going again, back left, past the starting position. Refocused. Paused. Sat back for a second, then peered into the eyepiece once more. "Now that *is* weird," she said.

## Chapter 8

---

I WAS PULLING into the parking lot below Private when my cell rang.

“Hey Darlene. So what’d you find out?” I wiped away a trickle of sweat running down my cheek. My car’s thermometer read ninety-two degrees.

“The police have ID’ed the victim. His name’s Ho Chang, nineteen, left Shore School last year. His father is Ho Meng, a well-known and very wealthy importer/exporter. The boy was reported missing two days ago.”

“Well that’s something.”

“I found out some other stuff too.”

“Great ... What?”

“I’d rather show you - in the lab.”

“See you in a minute.”

Mary and Johnny were in reception before me. I was surprised. It was only 8 am. I was even more surprised to see a tall man in a finely tailored suit getting out of one of the chairs across the coffee table. Beside him stood a guy in a gray suit. A bodyguard, I guessed. He had that boneheaded look about him.

Johnny retreated and Mary led me over. “This is Mr Ho Meng ... My boss, Craig Gisto.”

We shook hands.

“I just heard,” I said. “Please accept my ...”

He raised a hand, shaking his head slowly.

I was lost for words for a moment, then put out a hand to indicate we should walk along to my office.

Mary and Ho sat at opposite ends of my sofa and I pulled round a chair. The bonehead stood by the door, arms folded.

“Mr. Ho and I have met before,” Mary began. She was wearing cargo pants and a tight, short-sleeved tee that accentuated the girth of her arms. “Mr. Ho was a Commissioner in the Hong Kong Police Force. I met him when he delivered a special lecture at the Military Police College a few years back.”

“I would like you to find my son’s killer,” Ho responded. His voice was remarkably refined. I guessed Oxford or Cambridge.

“I assume the police are ...”

“I do not trust the Australian police, Mr. Gisto.”

I watched him. He’d drifted off into grief for a second, but then his expression hardened, a carefully constructed shield against the world.

“Well, of course, Mr. Ho. That’s what we do.”

“My son was reported missing more than two days ago. His death was preventable. The police did nothing.”

“I’m sure they tried.”

“Don’t make excuses for them, Mr. Gisto.” He had his imperious hand up again. “They’re either incompetent, lazy or lack resources. Whatever it is I won’t work with them.”

“Mr. Ho, what can you tell us about your son? Any clues how he got into trouble?” Mary asked.

He sighed. “Chang was a wonderful boy. Headstrong, for sure. He was profoundly deaf, but struggled for independence. He was a brilliant lip-reader. Insisted he have his own apartment as soon as he left school.”

“He was deaf?” I said, surprised.

Ho nodded. “From the age of four.” He glanced at Mary. “I would be the first to admit that this is partly my fault. I’ve not exactly been a model father. Chang’s mother died twelve years ago. I’ve been obsessed with my business. I