

Three
extraordinary
detectives.

A city full
of secrets.



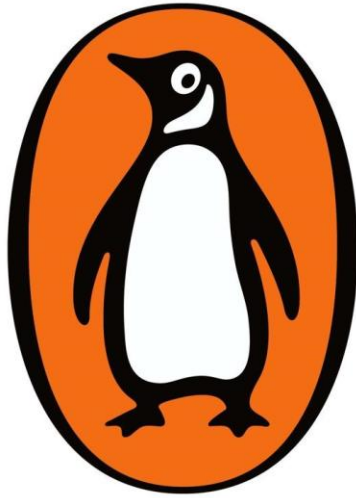
**Holmes,
Margaret
and Poe**

'Loved it'
CHRIS
WHITAKER

**JAMES
PATTERSON**

THE WORLD'S BESTSELLING THRILLER WRITER

& BRIAN SITTS



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[A list of titles by James Patterson appears at the back of this book](#)

James Patterson
& Brian Sitts

HOLMES, MARGARET AND POE



“Very few of us are what we seem.” —AGATHA
CHRISTIE

CHAPTER 1

Last year

THE VACANT INDUSTRIAL space that Realtor Gretchen Wik was trying to unload was located in a recently gentrified Brooklyn neighborhood called Bushwick. The area was becoming trendier by the month, but this particular building was cold and dead—and apparently unsellable.

Gretchen had been sitting at her sales table on the first floor since noon, tapping her nails while she stared out through a grime-coated window. In five hours, she had not been visited by a single prospect.

The property consisted of nine thousand square feet on two levels. But it was run-down and needed a lot of work. At this point, Gretchen felt like the worn wood floors and flaking brick walls were mocking her. She checked her watch. In exactly two minutes, her open house would officially be a bust.

Then she heard the front door open.

“Hello?” A voice from the entry hall. Gretchen’s pulse perked up. She pushed back her chair and walked briskly toward the door, her three-inch heels clicking on the hardwood. She rounded the corner to the entryway.

“It’s *you!*” said a tall, light-skinned Black man in a camel overcoat. For a second, Gretchen was thrown. Then the man pointed at the folding sign in the foyer, the one with Gretchen’s face plastered on it.

“Right. Yes,” said Gretchen, turning on her best smile. “Positive ID.” She held out her hand. “Gretchen Wik, Lexington Realty.”

“Brendan,” said the visitor, “Holmes.” He had large brown eyes and a neatly shaved head. Gretchen did her routine two-second overview. Coat: expensive, well tailored. Shoes: Alexander McQueen. This guy might be a lookie-loo, but at least he didn’t seem like a total waste of time. And right now, he was the only game in town.

“Welcome to your future,” said Gretchen. She waved her arm toward the open space. Then she heard the door opening again.

“Sorry, have I missed it?” Another male voice.

This time it was a fit, compact man with wavy, dark hair and the kind of thin moustache that can look either silly or sexy, depending on the owner. On him, Gretchen thought it worked—kind of brooding and rakish at the same time. Most important, he was another prospect. The day was looking up.

“You’re in luck,” she said. “Right under the wire.”

“I’m Auguste. Auguste Poe.” Soft voice, with a solemn tone. And the slightest wisp of liquor on his breath.

“I’m Gretchen,” said the agent. She paused for a second as the names registered. *Wait*. First somebody named *Holmes*, and now *Poe*? What were the odds? Or was this some kind of put-on?

Before Gretchen could ask any questions, both men walked ahead of her into the main space. She caught up and launched into her spiel—the same one she’d been practicing at her lonely table all morning.

“Gentlemen, you’re looking at the very best bargain in Bushwick. Late nineteenth century construction, slate roof, terra cotta details, original skylights ...”

“Pardon me? Anybody home?” The door again. A female voice this time, with a charming British accent.

Gretchen switched on her greeting smile again, getting even more excited. Two minutes ago, she had zero prospects.

Now, suddenly, she had three.

CHAPTER 2

“AM I TOO late?” the woman asked.

“Not at all,” said the Realtor. “I’m Gretchen.”

“I’m Margaret Marple.”

Hold on, thought Gretchen. *Holmes. Poe. And now Marple??*

She registered a quick impression of the new arrival: Attractive, but not flashy. Minimal makeup. Tweed skirt with an inexpensive top. The accent was refined. The look was practical.

“I have to ask,” said Gretchen. “Your names ...”

“Tell me something,” said Holmes, ignoring the impending question. He was picking a piece of loose mortar from a brick wall. “Why is it still on the market?”

Gretchen cleared her throat. “I’m sorry, what?” Never mind the names. She had some selling to do.

“Your price per square foot dropped from six forty-five to five ninety in two weeks,” said Holmes. “So I’m just wondering ...” He stopped midsentence and wrinkled his nose. “What is that *smell*?”

Gretchen realized that she was now playing defense. “Well, the building used to be a bakery,” she said. “Maybe it’s ...?”

“No,” Holmes said firmly, moving toward the other side of the room. “This is recent—and quite caustic.”

When he reached the large factory window on one wall of the space, he pushed the bottom half open and leaned out. “There was a tattoo parlor next door,” he said. It was a statement, not a question. Poe and Marple walked over to join Holmes at the window.

Gretchen was familiar with the view, and it wasn’t great. Her prospects were looking at the neighboring building, a one-story wreck with a corrugated door sealing the front. Plastic bins and trash littered a small paved area at the rear.

“I can check the property records,” said Gretchen, trying to glide past the unsavory subject. “I know it’s unoccupied at the moment.” “PAHs,” said Holmes.

“Pardon?” said Gretchen.

“Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Used in black inks. They have a bit of a car-tire taint.”

“Funny,” said Gretchen. “I don’t smell a thing.”

“I’m hyperosmic,” said Holmes. “Blessing and a curse.”

Gretchen realized that she was quickly losing control of the tour. “Sorry, I don’t—”

“Unnaturally acute sense of smell,” said Holmes. “A genetic fluke.”

“Maybe we should check out the second floor?” Gretchen hinted, pointing toward a rusted metal staircase.

Poe gestured graciously. “Ladies first.” Gretchen took the lead, praying that the corroded treads would support the weight of four people. The second

floor was as wide-open and empty as the first, except for a scattering of abandoned office furniture. "Take your time," said Gretchen.

"Any questions, just ask."

As Marple ran a finger across a dusty bookshelf, Holmes dipped to one knee and scratched a floor plank with his fingernail. "Low-grade pine," he mumbled. He pulled a small metal ball from his pocket, placed it on the floor, and watched it roll lazily toward the wall. "Two-point-five-centimeter slope," he added with a frown.

Gretchen was trying to decide which of the three she should focus on. Holmes was clearly a fastidious nitpicker, maybe even obsessive. Marple seemed quiet and thoughtful. Poe was harder to read. Gretchen studied his face as he pulled open the top drawer of a creaking metal office filing cabinet and peeked in. He hadn't smiled once since he arrived, but there was something darkly magnetic about him.

"Just so I'm clear," Gretchen asked, realizing her three prospects might be shopping together, "are all of you ...?"

"My God!" Poe exclaimed. "Murder!"

Gretchen froze as Poe pulled a yellowed newspaper clipping out of a file. His expression turned even more dour. "Someone was killed here," he said.

"What?" said Holmes, suddenly energized.

"Really?" said Marple.

Poe waved the clipping. "Take a look."

He smoothed the scrap of newsprint on top of the file. Gretchen's gut was churning. The seller had warned her about this grim historical factoid.

Dammit! She should have checked the drawers before the showing.

Marple ran her finger down the article and turned to Gretchen. "So it's true?"

Gretchen cleared her throat. "I'd heard rumors," she said carefully, "but ___"

"Not a rumor," snapped Holmes. "It's right here in black and white."

Gretchen stepped closer and looked over Poe's shoulder. The paper was brittle, but the type was clear. DEATH IN A BAKERY, the headline read. And underneath, "Young Girl Slain Before Dawn." The one-column story was accompanied by a photograph of a building.

The building they were in.

“Her throat was slit,” said Poe. “On the floor right below us. In 1954. She was just nineteen.”

Marple winced. “That poor child.”

Gretchen pictured her commission evaporating before her eyes. She did a quick mental calculation, ready to cut the price on the spot. Who the hell would pay almost six hundred dollars per square foot for a murder site?

Before she could float a new number, all three of her prospects turned and spoke at once.

“We’ll take it!”

CHAPTER 3

Present day

AUGUSTE POE WAS anxious to get moving. A teacher had once described him as having an excitable temperament, and it was showing this morning.

As he exited the newly renovated bakery building in a crisp linen suit, Poe glanced at the fresh lettering on the front door. Gold leaf in a classic font. It looked expensive and exclusive. Holmes, Marple & Poe Investigations finally felt legit, and today was the day that would put them on the map. Poe was sure of it. They had the right case. They had the right skills. They just needed to execute flawlessly—as a team.

As he waited impatiently for his two partners, Poe walked to the bakery’s former loading bay and wiped a speck of dust off the hood of his newly acquired 1966 Pontiac GTO. Montero Red. Tri-Power upgrade. XS Ram Air package. He’d paid fifty thousand to a Newark collector and considered it a steal. Poe was obsessive about anything mechanical, and muscle cars were a particular weakness. Despite outrageous Brooklyn garage fees, he owned an impressive collection, rotating his rides according to his mood.

“Good God, Auguste, what is that *monstrosity*?”

Margaret Marple was standing outside the office door in a neat business jacket and skirt, staring at the Pontiac.

“It rides as smooth as a town car,” Poe said, knowing she preferred more discreet transportation. “I promise you.”

Marple frowned. "I'll wrinkle my outfit, folding myself into that thing."

"Margaret, you need to be more flexible," said Brendan Holmes, exiting the door right behind her. He plucked a speck of lint from his suit jacket as he walked toward the car.

"Let's go!" Poe said as he slid in behind the steering wheel.

The powerful Pontiac was no advantage on the trip to One Police Plaza. The crosstown drive through Brooklyn was torturous, with a lot of stop-and-go on the way. Poe could feel his partners' nerves too. Their plan hinged on getting in front of Police Commissioner Jock Boolin. And Boolin was a notoriously hard man to corner.

The commissioner was new to his post, recently appointed by New York City mayor Felix Rollins after a long career in Chicago. This would be their first in-person encounter. By all accounts, Boolin was a hard-nosed cop and a savvy political operator. Poe and his partners had done their due diligence. Now it was time for a critical face-to-face.

The topic they wanted to discuss was a case that was consuming the city: the mysterious disappearance of a young Black attorney named Sloane Stone.

Sloane's impressive résumé ticked through Poe's mind as he drove. Brooklyn girl made good. Harvard undergraduate. Yale Law. Junior associate at a top New York law firm. Brilliant and beautiful. The profile picture on her law-firm website showed Sloane Stone to be a young woman with bright eyes, a huge smile, and dark hair worn full and natural, with a few tight curls falling across her forehead. Missing for two weeks now without a trace. The pressure on NYPD—and the new commissioner in particular—was growing more intense by the day.

The new firm had gotten an anonymous tip, and what they'd learned was about to shake up the whole city. Poe glanced in the rearview mirror as Marple pulled up the latest reports on her iPhone.

"Any breakthroughs?" asked Poe.

"The authorities are still baffled," said Marple.

"Good," said Holmes. "We're not."

As Poe headed for the Brooklyn Bridge crossing into Manhattan, he got a fresh tingle of anticipation. This was it—their first high-profile case—and he and his partners were determined to break it wide open.

Even if nobody had actually hired them.

CHAPTER 4

WHEN THE THREE investigators arrived on the top floor of One Police Plaza, Poe led the way to the commissioner's suite, where a late-twentysomething receptionist sat behind a huge oak desk. He glanced at the assistant's nameplate as he stepped forward, then cleared his throat and adjusted his voice to a tone of warm familiarity, as if he had known her forever.

"Samantha," he said. "Good morning. How are you? We need to see the commissioner—immediately."

"*Who* does?" the receptionist shot back. In just two words, Poe detected the distinctive inflection of a Queens native. He looked closer. Samantha's wardrobe and jewelry conveyed a tone of edgy self-assurance, and her manicured nails looked as sharp as daggers. Poe immediately realized that she was no pushover.

"Holmes, Marple, and Poe Investigations," he said. He flicked a business card from his wallet with the flair of an illusionist.

Samantha took it.

"Holmes, Marple, and Poe?" she said. "Is that a joke?"

Holmes leaned over the desk. "We're private investigators. And we have important information for the commissioner. *Critical* information."

Samantha shifted her cold stare in his direction. "Do you have an appointment?"

Marple stepped forward. "We have intelligence on the disappearance of Sloane Stone," she said softly. "It involves the mayor."

Samantha tilted her head. "Sloane Stone?" Poe noticed a sudden uptick of interest. The receptionist lowered her head and tapped her touchscreen. Poe could hear her speaking tersely into her headset.

About thirty seconds later, a blond-haired woman in a dark suit walked into the reception area. She was tall and elegant. Also, Poe gathered from her body language, stern and efficient.

"I understand you have information concerning the mayor," she said.

Poe nodded and handed her a business card. "Holmes, Marple, and Poe Investigations. Are you from the mayor's office?"

“I’m Kristin Rove, special assistant to Mayor Rollins. Anything you have for the mayor, you can tell me.”

“Not this, I’m afraid,” said Poe.

“For the commissioner’s ears only at this point,” Marple added politely.

“Well, let me tell you how it works,” Kristin said, shifting her eyes from Marple to Holmes to Poe. “You don’t see the commissioner without going through Samantha, and you don’t see the mayor without going through me.” She glanced down at the business card. “So unless you’ve actually found Ms. Stone, you’ve come all the way from Brooklyn for nothing.” She handed the card back to Poe, then walked off.

Poe turned to Marple and nodded toward the reception desk. “You try.” It was time for a tag-team approach. Maybe Marple’s people skills would be more productive.

Poe knew that in addition to being a natural snoop, his partner was an intuitive student of human psychology. He stood back with Holmes and watched as Marple walked up to Samantha’s station and rested a hand on the polished oak top. The receptionist was clearly doing her best to ignore Marple’s presence, but she eventually looked up. “Can I help you?” “About your age. Am I right?” said Marple.

“Who?” asked Samantha.

“Sloane Stone.”

Samantha shifted awkwardly in her seat. “I guess.” A long pause. “But I went to Queensborough Community and she went to a fancy Ivy, so I think Sloane and I are sort of on different levels.”

“Were.”

“What?”

“*Were*. Past tense. One of you is dead.”

Samantha blinked. “You don’t know that!”

“Actually, we do,” said Marple. “We’re very good at our job. That’s why we’re here.” She lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. “The truth is, Samantha, we know more about the different kinds of human wickedness than anyone you’ve ever met.”

The receptionist stared at Marple for a second. Then she pulled off her headset, got up from her chair, and walked through a thick door behind the reception area. Success! Poe and Holmes stepped forward, poised and ready.

A few seconds later, Samantha was back. She sat down and picked up her headset again.

“Sorry.” She shrugged. “Commissioner Boolin has left for the day. He must have used his private exit.”

Poe glanced at his partners. “Not a problem,” he said. “We know where he lives.”

CHAPTER 5

HEADING NORTH ON the West Side Highway, the GTO's 380-horsepower engine growled as Poe speed-shifted through traffic. Once they passed Riverside Park, he opened it up further.

"Think he'll beat us home?" asked Holmes.

"Only if he took the chopper," said Poe.

The GPS had estimated a thirty-four-minute drive to Riverdale. It took twenty. Poe slowed the car to a crawl as they entered the narrow, tree-lined roads of the exclusive Fieldston enclave. The stately homes were set on natural hills and tucked away in cozy hollows. It was like a charming forest village, where low-end properties went for about two million. Poe drove slowly up Goodridge Avenue.

"I think your car might stand out a bit in this neighborhood," said Marple.

Poe looked around. Marple was right. The curved driveways were dotted with Mercedes, BMWs, and Teslas. He parked the flashy red Pontiac in a shady spot across from the entrance to Boolin's secluded estate, then climbed out of the car. Holmes and Marple followed. They took positions in a grove of fir trees near the stone pillars at the end of the driveway.

Just two minutes later, a black Suburban rolled up the street and pulled to a gentle stop. The rear door opened. Police Commissioner Boolin stepped out. He was tall and imposing, with wavy silver hair. Poe watched from behind a thick trunk as Boolin waved to his driver, who executed a skillful K-turn and drove off.

The commissioner walked to his mailbox and pulled out a small stack of envelopes and magazines, then started up the driveway, flipping through the mail as he went. Poe glanced at his partners and gave the signal. All at once, they stepped out from behind cover. Boolin looked up, startled.

"Anything interesting in the mail?" asked Holmes. "Or just the usual bribes?"

Boolin's expression darkened as the three PIs approached. "What are you doing here? I told my girl to get rid of you."