

A WOMEN'S MURDER CLUB THRILLER

JAMES PATTERSON

& MAXINE PAETRO



ALIVE

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**JAMES PATTERSON
& MAXINE PAETRO**



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*the unofficial members of
the Women's Murder Club.*

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

PROLOGUE

One

JUST AFTER SIX that morning, Warren Jacobi, a sixty-year-old retired homicide lieutenant and former chief of police, parked his Ford F-150 within walking distance of one of the eastern entrances to Golden Gate Park.

Jacobi was edgy in the best possible way, amped up, excited, feelings he hadn't had in years. Today was the day. After weeks of planning and tracking, within the next hour, he would bring down a killer.

He was a big man, 240 pounds, but he'd stayed in shape. This morning, he wore his bird-watching gear, camouflage pants, and a matching sweater under his tac vest. Binoculars hung from a strap around his neck, and his weapon was wedged against the small of his back by the waistband of his pants.

Jacobi entered the park, keeping to the tree shadows, looking for a merciless killer who delighted in outfoxing the police. Jacobi had to do this alone, and he could—but he was still haunted by the bureaucratic bull crap that had forced him into early retirement. He hadn't been able to shake the humiliation. Bottom line, he would not, could not, close out his life's work by leaving this psychotic predator at large.

Jacobi quickly slipped into a narrow pocket of rampant vegetation, a cleft in the living walls of dense vines and saplings. Inside this natural bivouac, he was virtually invisible but had partial views of the path looping around the Lily Pond below and back up to the street.

Years ago, he'd been walking the park when he saw a man acting suspiciously near the Lily Pond. When a teenage girl's dead body was pulled from the pond later that day, Jacobi knew what he'd witnessed—and what he'd failed to do earlier. He'd been too far away, and it had happened too

quickly, for him to even make an ID.

Parting branches and peering around a clump of trees now, Jacobi saw a great blue heron swoop down between the treetops and veer toward the pond. Through the zoom lens in his phone, Jacobi followed the large heron's flight path, then took pictures of the bird with its dark crown and long gray plumes on its breast. Below the heron, at the edge of the pond, Jacobi spotted his subject wearing a dark windbreaker, jeans, and a dark-colored baseball cap. The killer took a gun from his pocket and threw a shot at the bird. The bird veered away at the sound, and the shooter tossed the gun into the water. There was a splash, and then he turned on the path and slowly began to retrace his steps uphill.

Jacobi waited impatiently. He didn't have the authority to perform an arrest, but the former detective had zip ties in his vest pocket. Jacobi planned to surprise the guy as he walked past his hidey-hole and bodycheck him to the ground. Then, once he'd immobilized the SOB, he'd call Chief of Police Charles Clapper to let him know that he had a wanted killer secured and ready for roasting.

Two

WARREN JACOBI PATTED his vest's breast pocket and pulled out a tangle of zip ties, accidentally snagging the rest of the pocket's contents at the same time. *Never mind.* He shut off his phone's flash and took a few shots of the killer climbing the path. Then Jacobi paused to review the photos he'd just taken.

As he'd expected, the light from the faint sunrise behind him had been just bright enough to define plumage on a big freaking bird, but not so bright as to positively ID the killer. Jacobi slipped the phone into his vest's side pocket—and that's when he felt the crushing grip of a hand between his neck and right shoulder. A voice in his ear said, "You think I haven't seen you tailing me? Don't turn around."

He almost recognized that voice. *Who?*

"Okay, okay. You got me." Jacobi didn't dare resist capture with his back turned. He was tensing his muscles, reaching his right hand around toward the gun in his waistband. But before he touched the grip, he felt a searing pain in his lower right side.

Again and again while he was on his knees, then again and again, dropping him face down on the ground.

Jacobi turned his head to see his attacker, then cried out, "*No!*"

He closed his eyes as what felt like a saw ripped through the right side of his neck. His scream was cut short. As he wheezed out his last breath, Warren Jacobi was no longer in the present.

A soft breeze blew across his face, illuminated images strung together in a bright, lightning-like flash. Jacobi saw himself gathering his family into his arms. Putting a hand on his beloved Miranda's cheek and kissing her.