

DEAD LETTER DROP

Peter James was educated at Charterhouse, then at film school. He lived in North America for a number of years, working as a screenwriter and film producer before returning to England. His novels, including the *Sunday Times* number one bestselling Roy Grace series, have been translated into thirty-five languages, with worldwide sales of thirteen million copies. Three novels have been filmed. All his books reflect his deep interest in the world of the police, with whom he does in-depth research, as well as his fascination with science, medicine and the paranormal. He has also produced numerous films, including *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Al Pacino, Jeremy Irons and Joseph Fiennes. He divides his time between his homes in Notting Hill, London, and near Brighton in Sussex.

Visit his website at www.peterjames.com

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By Peter James

DEAD LETTER DROP

ATOM BOMB ANGEL

BILLIONAIRE

POSSESSION

DREAMER

SWEET HEART

TWILIGHT

PROPHECY

ALCHEMIST

HOST

THE TRUTH

DENIAL

FAITH

PERFECT PEOPLE

SHORT SHOCKERS: COLLECTION ONE

SHORT SHOCKERS: COLLECTION TWO

Children's Novel

GETTING WIRED!

Novella

THE PERFECT MURDER

The Roy Grace Series

DEAD SIMPLE

LOOKING GOOD DEAD

NOT DEAD ENOUGH

DEAD MAN'S FOOTSTEPS

DEAD TOMORROW

DEAD LIKE YOU

DEAD MAN'S GRIP

NOT DEAD YET

DEAD MAN'S TIME

DEAD LETTER DROP

PETER JAMES

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FOREWORD

Welcome to my first published novel, which crept, unseen and unnoticed, onto the bottom shelves at the rear of a handful of bookshops kind enough to stock it back in 1981 – and remained there, mostly unsold. I remember WH Smith, out of the goodness of their hearts, taking a grand total of thirty copies – a far cry from the 30,000 they would take of books that were destined for the bestseller lists! But I am still hugely grateful to them for giving a total unknown the kudos of being able to say, ‘Ah, yes, WH Smith stock it, actually!’

It was rejected by the first publisher who read it, New English Library, headed by Nick Webb. Seven years later, in 1988, he was to surprise me by outbidding all other UK publishers for my supernatural thriller *Possession*. The second publisher, to my joy and delight, bought it. WH Allen paid a princely £2,000 – not a lot of money even in those days.

It was not the first novel that I had written – I wrote three between 1967 and 1970 which, luckily, were never published at all, much to my dismay back then. The first was titled *Ride Down a Roller Coaster* and it was inspired by my hero at the time, a young writer called Adam Diment who wrote three massively successful, racy, spy thrillers – *The Dolly Dolly Spy*, *The Great Spy Race* and *The Bang Bang Birds* – which enabled him to live a Champagne lifestyle in his mid-twenties and drive an Aston Martin, a car I coveted above all others. *Roller Coaster* wasn’t a spy thriller; it was

a kind of rake's progress to disaster through the pop and drug world of my own teen era, the 1960s.

Unlike Adam Diment's first book, mine was turned down by an endless succession of UK agents and publishers. A friend who read it told me it might appeal more to American tastes than British. I bought a copy of *The Writers' and Artists' Year Book* and singled out a New York agent, Kurt Hellmer, who had one of the largest entries. Ever hopeful, I dutifully photocopied the manuscript and airmailed it to him. Imagine my surprise when six weeks later I received an airmail letter (this was in the days before that wonderful technology called fax) containing eight pages of effusive praise telling me I was a wonderful writer, but the book needed some editorial work, after which he was confident it would be published – and listing his thoughts with copious notes. But by then, now at film school, I was nearly at the end of my second novel *Atom Bomb Angel* (a title I was to use again over a decade later for my second published novel).

I sent him the new manuscript, but he replied that he didn't like it as much as *Roller Coaster* and please would I consider his notes. However, I had then started work on my third novel, a zany comedy titled *Bethlehem Where Are You?* Kurt hated this book with a vengeance and told me to go back to *Roller Coaster*. By now I had graduated from film school and emigrated to Canada, where I got a job, through a stroke of luck, at a Toronto television station, writing a daily programme for pre-school children called *Polka Dot Door*. I wrote proudly to Hellmer telling him the news. Within days I had a very snarky letter back from him, telling me to quit this job if I was serious about a career as a novelist, as I would never write a novel if I was writing for a day job. He advised me to get a job in a library or a factory.

I ignored his advice, *Roller Coaster* remained an unfin-

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ished project and instead I turned my energies to making films – starting with writing and producing a series of low-budget horrors, and then a comedy called *Spanish Fly*, starring Terry-Thomas and Leslie Phillips, which came out in 1976 to disastrous reviews. Barry Norman, then the doyen of all film critics, called it ‘The worst British film since the Second World War and the least funny British funny film ever made.’ I have the framed review hanging proudly in my office today!

Spanish Fly, in which I had invested myself heavily, wiped me out financially, and I was unsure what to do to recover. At this time my father and mother were running our successful family business, Cornelia James, Glovemakers to the Queen, with a factory in Brighton. My father became ill with heart trouble and they were thinking of selling the business. I realized that, having not made it as a writer, and being in a parlous financial state, it would be sensible to go into the business, which would at least give me a decent living. So I went to work in the factory, dimly remembering the advice of my agent, the lovely, patient Kurt Hellmer.

My then wife, and several friends who knew of my novel-writing ambitions, kept asking me if I was still going to try to achieve my dream of getting a book published. I was twenty-eight and it was a wake-up call. But what to write? Then, by chance, I read an article in *The Times* saying that with Adam Diment having stopped writing, and with Ian Fleming long dead, there was now an acute shortage of racy spy thrillers. It was a light-bulb moment for me!

I knew one person who had worked in the security services, Vanessa Gebbie, now a successful novelist in her own right, who had once been a secretary in MI5. Although restricted in what she could tell me, I gleaned enough from her, and from reading a raft of fiction and non-fiction about

MI5 and MI6, to have some idea of the world of spooks. I also had, buzzing in my head, an idea for an opening scene for a novel – but no idea where to take it from there.

So I wrote the scene – a man and a girl wake in his New York apartment, after a raunchy night, to find someone breaking into the room, who then, immediately and inexplicably, commits suicide. Unlike my Roy Grace novels, which I plot meticulously and always know the ending I want to arrive at, I had no idea what would happen next. So I just kept writing and writing and writing. Finally, in 1979, I finished the book. I titled it *A Pink Envelope with a Bright Blue Bow*.

I photocopied it and airmailed it to my agent, Kurt Hellmer, who I had not spoken to since 1971. Two months went by without hearing a word from him. I finally phoned his number and got a dead line tone. After several more phone calls, I learned that he had died six years earlier. I guess dead agents aren't a lot of use . . . !

I was recommended, through a brilliant entertainments industry lawyer, Bob Storer of Harbottle and Lewes, two agents. One was Debbie Owen, totally delightful, but clearly not that hungry as she was Jeffrey Archer's agent. The other, Jon Thurley, was just starting out on his own, and I was told he was hungry. Four days after I mailed him the book he phoned me to say he wanted to represent me, but I needed to change the title. Two months later I had the publishing deal I had always dreamed of, but never dared to believe would actually happen.

One of the strangest – and nicest – things about my writing career is that I have so often found myself writing about subjects that subsequently – entirely coincidentally – become major news, as with my fifth Roy Grace novel, *Dead Tomorrow*, which is about the murky world of the

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international trafficking of human organs. *Dead Letter Drop* is about the discovery of a mole deep within MI5. Within days of signing my publishing deal, the scandal of Anthony Blunt broke. A senior member of MI5, he had been exposed as a spy for Russia.

I hope you have as much fun reading *Dead Letter Drop* as I did writing it. Take it with a pinch of salt and please don't judge me too harshly!

Peter James
Sussex

1

There is a strange sensation you get when you know someone has entered your room but you haven't yet seen or heard him. You just feel him there. I got that feeling in my bedroom late one night. It was very late and very dark.

I had had the same chill before on a thousand different occasions, in a thousand different circumstances; a car breaking its grip on a wet road, an aeroplane dropping 5,000 feet in an air pocket, a shadow coming from a dark alley.

There was definitely someone in the room. He wasn't a friend. Friends don't drop by into my bedroom at 2.30 in the morning – not on the thirty-second floor of a building where the elevator has been switched off, and the key is in my jacket pocket, hanging on a chair near the bed, where there are 3 Ingersoll ten-lever deadlocks, 2 Chubb two-bolt upright mortices, a Yale No. 1, and a double safety chain, not to mention a 24-hour armed door surveillance, making entry to this building harder than the exit from most jails. He was no friend. I didn't move. He didn't move. I had an advantage over him: he thought I was asleep. He had a better advantage over me: he'd probably been in the dark for a long time and his eyes would be well accustomed to it. He had one bigger advantage still: he wasn't sprawled, stark naked, dripping in baby oil, with one foot manacled to the bedstead, and he didn't have a quietly sleeping naked bird occupying the 5 feet 11½ inches that separated an extremely greasy hand from an uncocked Beretta.

I spent the next several tenths of a second debating what

to do. My visitor obviously wasn't going to hang about for the rest of the evening – he'd have to have been a very dedicated voyeur to go to such lengths. He certainly wasn't any kind of cat burglar out to steal anything – the place didn't have any valuables, neither the Fort Knox nor the National Gallery variety; there was nothing in it that a colour-blind midget with an IQ of 24 couldn't have bought from a Bloomingdale's sale in half an hour flat for a couple of thousand dollars – and in fact probably had. What there was could best be described as embryonic Jewish Renaissance, and constituted the equivalent amount of personal effects you are likely to encounter walking into a room of a half-built Holiday Inn.

My visitor didn't seem like he wanted to chat. If he did, he'd probably have opened the dialogue by now. No, the most likely reason for his visit, I concluded in the two-tenths of a second it took me to weigh up the alternatives, was to do some killing.

On account of lack of choice the most likely victims seemed to be either Sumpy or me. Sumpy is a variation of 'sump' – a nickname I gave her for her fascination with Johnson's Baby Oil – at the procreation end, which is what she seemed to think it was for, rather than at the end product of same for which it was originally intended. If the visitor was for her it could only have been some jilted lover; since Houdini had died before she was born I ruled out the possibility of the caller being for her.

All of a sudden I felt lonely. Our house guest must have just about figured out who was who by now; a 9-millimetre silenced parabellum slug for me and a razor for her so she wouldn't be waking the neighbours with any hollering.

There was no way I could make it to my gun in time. There was no way I could swing my right foot high into the

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air and bring that bedstead crashing down on his head prior to having to retrieve my brains and most of my skull from my neighbour's apartment. It was equally unlikely that if I remained still he might go away.

The bang came. Not a quiet, silenced plug sound but a great, hefty, high-velocity, 200-grain magnum .44 explosion, and death descended on me. It was a hot, dark thump; a huge, great weight that crushed my bone and shot the wind out of me, shot all the wind out of me. It was damp and bloody and hurt like hell. It was the son-of-a-bitch visitor himself.

He lay there, sprawled over the top of me, revolver sticking in his mouth and most of the back of his skull deposited out onto Park Avenue.

I sat up, managed to get the lights on. There were shouts. There were yells and footsteps and bells and sirens and pounding sounds, and Sumpy woke up without even opening her eyes and asked if I had gone mad and went back to sleep again.

I disentangled my foot and staggered to the kitchen to put the kettle on – it didn't look as if I was going to get much more sleep that night. I cracked my head on a cupboard door because I was confused. Reckon I had a right to be. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to commit suicide.

2

What a hell of a night it had been. I wanted to spend the morning forgetting it for a few hours. It was a glorious, cold, November Sunday morning and Manhattan looked just great. Only a few factories and few exhaust pipes were chucking their excrement into the sky. The World Trade Centre and the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building and all the rest of Manhattan's fantastic skyline stood crisp and clear against and into the sky, just as all its creators had ever envisioned it should.

Sumpy and I stood wrapped in our coats on the open deck of the Staten Island ferry with the water of the Hudson river churning past us. I took a large bite from the still-warm potato knish I had been carrying in a paper bag in my pocket, and hoped it would mop up some of the pints and pints of coffee that swilled in my insides and take the taste of the Marlboros and Winstons and Salems and Tareyton Lights and Camel Lights and Cools and Mores and Chesterfields and all the other cigarettes I had been able to scrounge during the night, out of my mouth and throat and lungs and everywhere else.

That knish tasted good. It came from Yonah Schimmel's. The Yonah Schimmel Knish Bakery is one of the great eating establishments of the world; if the Michelin gastronomic guide extended to the US it would surely mention it as 'worthy of a detour'. Anybody who hasn't been there has to go. It is spectacularly insignificant in appearance; it sits in one of the dirtiest, dreariest, grungiest places on God's earth,

deep in the heart of Manhattan, on the forlorn border between the East Village and Lower East Side, a bottle cap's flick from the Bowery; a solitary five-storey brownstone with a yellow fascia board that stands next to the yard of Blevitzky Bros Monuments, where two elderly vans sit, sagging on their suspension, behind collapsing wire-fencing. The street in front is a dismal dual carriageway with odd bits of barren shrubbery; there are morose and grubby people wandering around, and bits of garbage rolling along in the wind. It could pass with no difficulty as a suburb of any of a hundred American cities.

The inside isn't much of an improvement. A sign behind a high counter invites the clientele to 'Try our new cherry cheesecake knish!' and looks at least 10 years old. Behind the counter stands a short elderly man in a white apron with the burden of the world on his shoulders. The restaurant is empty except for two men in battered leather jackets deep in discussion but he still doesn't have much time to spare to take orders. He marches over to a dumb waiter, a real one with a rope pull, and barks down the shaft, then stands on guard beside it with the hapless look of a sentry on a winter's night.

What comes up from that dumb waiter, however, is pure gold; busting with every conceivable filling – large, heavy, lovingly misshapen, immensely fattening and doubtlessly knee-deep in cholesterol.

Early on that Sunday morning, paradise was a warm Yonah Schimmel potato knish, eaten with the salted breeze of the Hudson and the warm perfume of Sumpy.

I'd kept the truth from her so far. What she thought was simply that we'd had an intruder and I had shot him. I decided that for the time being, and probably for ever, it was best to leave it that way. She thought I'd done some-

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thing brave and heroic in saving both our lives. I'd no desire to take false credit, but on the other hand she was a bright girl and I didn't want to set her thinking too much in case she came to the realisation that there might be more to my job in the plastic box manufacturing business than met the ordinary long, short or squint-sighted naked eye. And that wouldn't be any good at all.

So Mr Big Hero took another bite of his potato knish and stared out at the badlands and goodlands of sleepy-time Staten Island, where 328,000 Americans were waking to a bright, sunny, all-American Sunday morning, to the *New York Sunday Times* crossword, and waffles, syrup and bacon, and a gentle screw, and toothpaste, and coffee, and no clatter of the garbage trucks today.

'It's cold,' she said, and she was right; it was cold, damn cold and it felt good, for in the warm a soft slunky feeling would have crept straight up my body and put me in the land of nod, and there wasn't going to be any nod for a long time yet, because when we got back to Manhattan I was going to have to go into the police station at West 54th and spend most of this beautiful day inside its dismal grey walls, answering questions and filling out forms and watching the dregs and misfits and victims of humanity be dragged interminably in and out, for speeding, murder, pickpocketing, mugging, knifing, raping, and reporting lost tabby cats and black widow spiders.

There was no shortage of forms, and carbon copies to go under the forms, and columns to be filled in on the forms. I could have done it all myself in about ten minutes flat, with the aid of a couple of IBM computers and three dozen secretaries; unfortunately the only equipment that the city of New York could offer me was a battered, old, manual

Olivetti, with a lower-case 't' that had broken off, and a pair of index fingers attached to 18 stone of fattened flesh in a uniform grubby enough to give anorexia to a clothes moth. His dexterity at extricating his breakfast from his teeth with one finger, picking his nose with another, his ear with a third and typing at the same time was remarkable; but it was the typing that suffered the most.

Relays of coffee arrived in receptacles that made British Rail's plastic beakers seem like Crown Derby. There were no knishes and doughnuts weren't available on this block on a Sunday; none others were worth eating, the resident doughnut expert informed me, but there was a Puerto Rican topless go-go dancer who did blow jobs in the men's room of a coke den up in Harlem Sunday lunchtime, if I was interested in taking a ride. But it didn't particularly appeal.

The keys clacked intermittently, punctuated by the odd curse as he filled in the lower-case 't's by hand, and I began, gratefully, to drift into a few minutes of sleep. When I woke, Supertypist had an added burden to his bogeys and his breakfast and his Olivetti: some idiot had given him a carton of honey-barbecued spare ribs.

Several hours later the last rib hit the waste bin and the last sheet of the forms was wrenched out of the machine. I read through it and put my signature on it, and he read through it and put his 'X' on it and smudged it. My hand was shaken and my back patted. I had been a good boy. I had grappled fearlessly with an intruder, seized his weapon, shot him, and then had the good sense to call the police and fill out their forms for them, and there would be no need for me to attend the inquest, and if I would care to step outside it would be nothing short of a pleasure for the City of New York to provide me with a freebie ride home in a patrol car.

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I was tired – dog, dog tired – and wanted out of that police station and into bed. I went outside and breathed the chill air, and watched the steam pouring out of a subway vent in the road, and listened to the distant hum of cars and far-off sirens. Peace. It was growing dark; some street-lamps were on, the rest were flickering to get on. Sumpy would be at her apartment by now, back from lunch with her brother and sister-in-law and their three kids in their house by the sea down in Mamaroneck; just the normal routine of a normal life.

The car pulled up for me, four great burly cops inside. They all looked reasonably alert – it's strange how you can tell something like that just from shadows or silhouettes, but you can. One in the back stepped out to hold the door for me and then climbed in after me; I sat in the middle of the back seat, snugly wedged between two uniformed hulks. They were big, comfortably big. I lounged back into the greasy vinyl and inhaled the smell of plastic and stale cigarettes that most American cars smell of, and listened to the tramp, tramp noise of the tyres that all American cars make. I felt relaxed and was about to start up some friendly chatter when I felt a hard thin object slide in between my thighs and come firmly to rest against my right ball.

'Don troy nuttin.'

I don't know what the hell they expected me to try. Even if they were all unconscious the only way I could have got out of that car would have been to have drilled a hole in the roof. All of a sudden I felt very awake again. I felt very awake, but I knew I was tired, overtired, dangerously overtired, and that's not good.

3

One half of me was sorely tempted not to bother to find out who they were, or where they were taking me, or what they planned to do, but just to crash out, let them take me wherever they planned and let the chips fall where they might.

The other half of me that had kept me out of the long wooden box for over three decades wasn't going to have any of it. Secretly I was glad about that.

'Know thine enemy,' says the Good Book. On my 18 months' intensive training in the Highlands six years back I'd been told much the same. I studied them, listening to their chatter: not a great deal to listen to – scrambled eggs for brains in their dialogue department; the highlight of their conversation was whether it would be better to take the first, second or third left to get to the Henry Hudson Parkway. They could count to three.

They were goons, four big rented goons, and I had an ominous feeling that they hadn't got the wrong man; I could almost hear a cement-mixer grinding away in the trunk, making the quick-drying concrete for a pair of snug-fitting size 9½ boots.

I stared through the hairs in the goon on my right's nostrils at the far-away lights of the Bronx as we cruised up the west bank of the Hudson, along the scenic Palisades Parkway past the neatly mown grass and the neatly trimmed hedges and the neatly painted signs to the neatly laid-out beauty spots – all carefully done to show how wealthy and prosperous the State of New Jersey was compared to its

shabby neighbour on the other side of that deep, deep river. And tonight it looked deeper than ever.

There was an acute pain in my backside. What had felt like a small lump at the beginning of the ride was hurting more and more at each bump we went over. It was something I was sitting on. The pain, combined with the jabs from the shooter in my private parts every time we jolted, was beginning to make me feel irritable.

The two-way radio suddenly crackled into life. 'Bravo Delta, are you on time for the wedding?'

One of the goons in the front replied, 'Bravo Delta picked up the groom.'

There was a pause while the usual squawks and screeches came through the speaker, then, 'Roger, Bravo Delta, we're on our way to collect the bride. See you at the church.'

'You got it,' said the goon.

It didn't tax my brain a great deal to work out who the bride might be, but just to help me out the goon in the front passenger seat, whose teeth looked like they had suffered a bad attack from termites, and whose breath smelt like he'd been drinking from a rain-tub full of dead bats, turned the ghastly assembly of scars, dents, spots and boils, perched above his neck and below his hat, that passed as his head. 'Means your broad, sweetheart.'

If nothing else, this gem of English syntax annihilated the remainder of my fears about them having the wrong man. However, it didn't make the pain in my backside any better, and it didn't make me feel any happier. Nor did it give me any better clue as to who they were or what they wanted: a corpse, or a source of information – at the end of it all, probably both. I wasn't overly inclined towards letting them have either; however, in light of the current situation, unless I did something pretty smart, and pretty quickly, it

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didn't seem that my opinion was going to amount to a hill of beans.

We turned off the Parkway onto 9 West, curving round and underneath the Parkway onto a thickly wooded two-lane road. It was starting to rain; it was light rain, but it hit the car with a distinct slashing sound – a sound I had heard before when it rained in temperatures as cold as it was today: freezing rain – one of the most lethal of all driving hazards. To the driver it looks like ordinary rain, and it is, except that the moment it touches the surface it turns to ice; within moments of freezing rain starting, the road turns into an ice rink. It is not an uncommon phenomenon in the north eastern seaboard states during the winter. It is very difficult and very frightening to drive on. Muttered curses from the front seat, and the motion of the speed of the car easing slightly, indicated that the driver had recognised the hazard; whilst this rain lasted, and it wouldn't last for long, I didn't have to worry about the driver.

I tried in the gloom to study as best I could the shooter that was wedged between my legs; it was either a Smith and Wesson .44 revolver or a cheap copy cranked out by some back-street supplier. Either way it would be about the nearest thing to a hand-held Howitzer, well capable of carrying my crown jewels down through the seat and out through the bottom of the car. If it was a copy then I needed to worry about the trigger mechanism since it probably would be unreliable and more than a little sensitive to the slightest movement – ideal for the type of gorilla holding it, since his breed were not the type to discriminate too much about when or where their shooters went off just as long as they went off long enough and often enough to keep them on someone's payroll.

The goon on my right was gazing out the window, off

guard. The one in the passenger seat in front was wiping condensation off the windshield. Through the windshield, a long way ahead, was a green traffic light. Between us and the traffic light was the battery of tail lights of a large truck, probably a tractor-trailer. We were travelling downhill, and too quickly for the surface.

The goon in the front passenger seat switched on the ordinary radio; a commercial jingle blared out. The music stopped and a jolly voice told us all what rotten, lousy, stinking husbands we'd all be if we didn't rush out instantly and make arrangements to have Whamtrash drainage systems installed in our homes and make life for our wives one whole lot easier. From the silence of the goons I could only think they were contemplating the advantages of a Whamtrash system.

'One of your friends came into my apartment last night and shot the wrong guy,' I announced.

The goon with the halitosis swivelled his head around. 'Shaddup.' He turned his head back to watch the road.

The traffic light was turning red. The radio told us of amazing bargains to be had at a local Pontiac dealer. All we had to do was go there and ask for Elmer Hyams. Elmer Hyams would do us real good. We would do our family unit a lot of good by buying a brand new Pontiac. We couldn't buy a brand new Pontiac anywhere else in the United States of America cheaper than by dropping in and saying 'Hi!' to Elmer Hyams.

I rammed my left thumb down hard, real hard, into the trigger mechanism of the goon's 44 and felt the hammer hit my thumb, hit it hard; my right hand smashed down on the reflex nerve of his gun hand, the gun jerked up and I jerked my thumb out; the hammer carried on down to the shell, hit the shell good and hard; the bullet blew out and took a

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chunk out of the roof; another bullet blew out and took another chunk out of the roof; another bullet blew out and took off most of the roof of the goon on my right's head; another bullet blew out and went in between the goon in the front seat's shoulder blades, and came out of his chest carrying most of his heart with it, and took most of his heart out through the windshield and into the New Jersey countryside.

I now had the gun. The driver had both hands on the wheel and was trying to see what was going on in the back. He forgot for a moment about the red light and the truck that had stopped, then remembered. He stamped on the anchors on the iced-up road and was turning the wheel this way and that. I thumped the goon on my left's balls so hard he jumped up in the air. I had the door handle down and shoved him hard before he came back down in his seat, shoved him out into the road, and I was rolling out there with him. Another bullet blew out and went through his Adam's apple. I thumped into the grass verge and rolled over. I saw the big black car do one complete circle and then slide, nose first, straight under the long, long tailgate of that big, big truck, and that tailgate swallowed up the big black car as it went further and further under, slicing through the windshield, and through the steering wheel, and clean through the necks of the driver and his passenger, depositing their heads in the lap of the goon in the rear seat; it carried right on, slicing through the neck of the goon in the rear seat and depositing what was left of his head out through the rear windshield, so it rolled down the trunk of the car, bounced off the rear fender, and came to a rest a little way up the road.

The stabbing pain in my ass was still there. I gingerly felt my behind and found a big lump, a big, sharp lump. I

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pulled, and it came away from my trousers, and I held it up in the gloom: it was a set of false teeth.

I sat down, took some gulps of air and carbon monoxide. The highway had gone very quiet. Away up, I could hear the sounds of the truck driver retching. It was the only sound and it went on for a long time.