



A DETECTIVE MICHAEL BENNETT THRILLER

GOONE

JAMES
PATTERSON
& MICHAEL LEDWIDGE

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Forced into hiding from a mass murderer seeking vengeance, Detective Michael Bennett must decide whether to stay and protect his family, or hunt down the man who is hunting them.

When Bennett arrested Manuel Perrine, he thought he had brought an end to the drug cartel boss's reign of terror and would get justice for the murder of his best friend. But then, during the trial, Perrine escaped.

In a bloody shoot-out, Bennett killed Perrine's wife. Now he wants nothing more than to make Bennett suffer, to make him pay.

The whole family are moved to a safe-house in California. But as Perrine's attacks on US soil become more vicious and more daring, it's clear there is a war coming.

No one, anywhere, is safe.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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 is a founding partner of Booktrust’s Children’s Reading Fund in the UK. In 2010, he was voted Author of the Year at the Children’s Choice Book Awards in New York.

MICHAEL LEDWIDGE is the author of ten novels, including seven *New York Times* bestsellers co-authored with James Patterson. He lives with his wife and three children in Connecticut.

ALSO BY JAMES PATTERSON

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Run for Your Life (*with Michael Ledwidge*)
Worst Case (*with Michael Ledwidge*)
Tick Tock (*with Michael Ledwidge*)
I, Michael Bennett (*with Michael Ledwidge*)

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Pop Goes the Weasel
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London Bridges
Mary, Mary
Cross
Double Cross
Cross Country
Alex Cross's Trial (*with Richard DiLallo*)
I, Alex Cross
Cross Fire
Kill Alex Cross
Merry Christmas, Alex Cross
Alex Cross, Run
Cross My Heart (*to be published November 2013*)

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The 5th Horseman (*with Maxine Paetro*)
The 6th Target (*with Maxine Paetro*)
7th Heaven (*with Maxine Paetro*)
8th Confession (*with Maxine Paetro*)
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Private LA (*with Mark Sullivan, to be published January 2014*)

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GONE

**JAMES
PATTERSON**

& MICHAEL LEDWIDGE



CENTURY

PROLOGUE
FATHER AND SON

ONE

IT WAS THREE A.M. on the button when the unmarked white box truck turned onto the steep slope of Sweetwater Mesa Road and began to climb up into the exclusive Serra Retreat neighborhood of Malibu, California.

Majestic mountain peaks rising to the left, thought Vida Gomez as she looked out from the truck's passenger seat. *Nothing but moonlit ocean to the right.* No wonder so many movie stars lived here.

As if the sights matter, Vida thought, tearing her eyes off the million-dollar view and putting them back on the screen of the iPhone in her lap. What was up with her? She never got distracted on a job. She took a calming breath. She seriously needed to buckle down. Taking her eye off the ball here would not be prudent. Not tonight.

She was in the midst of typing a text when out of the corner of her eye she noticed the driver trying to look down her shirt again. No wonder she was a little off her game, she thought with a muffled sigh. The new, pudgy driver that the cartel had sent at the last minute was incompetence walking on two legs. That was just like them to send her some fat-assed chump for "training" at the last minute. All he had to do was drive, and apparently, he couldn't get even that done.

The next time the oaf let his eyes wander, Vida made a command leadership decision. She calmly lifted the MGP-84 machine pistol in her lap and placed the long, suppressed barrel to one of his stubbled chins.

"Do you think we're on a hot date here tonight? On the way to the prom, maybe? By all means, give me your best line, Romeo. If it's good enough, maybe we'll skip first and go straight to second base," she said.

"I'm sorry," the suddenly sweating driver said after a long, tense beat. "I made a mistake."

"No, that was your parents," Vida said, digging the gun in hard under his fleshy chin. "Now, here's the deal. You can either (a) keep your eyes on the road, or (b) I can splatter what little brains you possess all over it instead. Which do you prefer?"

"A," the driver said, nodding rapidly after a moment. "I choose a. Please, señorita."

"Excellent," Vida said, finally lowering the chunky black metal pistol. "I'm so glad we had this little talk."

The truck killed its lights before they pulled into the darkened driveway of 223 Sweetwater Mesa Road ten minutes later. She was about to retext the alarm company tech they'd bribed when he finally texted back. It was a one-word message, but it was enough.

Disabled, it said.

She wheeled around and slid open the small window that separated the rear of the truck from the cab. The eight cartel soldiers crouched there were wearing black balaclavas over their faces, black fatigues, black combat boots.

"*Ándele*," she barked rabidly at them. "It's time. What are you waiting for?"

The truck's rear double doors opened silently, and the black-clad men issued forth onto the shadowed driveway and began gearing up. They strapped themselves into military-grade personal protective equipment, black nuclear-biological-chemical suits. Each suit had a self-contained breathing apparatus and was made of rubber over reinforced nylon and charcoal-impregnated felt.

Vida joined her men, slowly and carefully fitting the positive-pressure mask over her face before meticulously checking the suit's material for any slits or gaps, as per her extensive training. When she was done, she bit her lip as she stared up at the seven-thousand-square-foot mission-

style house behind the wrought iron gate. She let out a tense breath and closed her eyes, wondering if she was going to throw up the flock of butterflies swirling in her stomach.

She felt stage fright every time right before a job, but this was ridiculous. It was the uncertainty of what they were about to try. What they were about to do was ... something new, something so volatile, so incredibly dangerous.

I really don't want to do this, Vida thought for the hundredth time.

Who was she kidding? As if she had a choice after accepting her latest promotion. The path before her was excessively simple. Either go through with what the cartel had ordered or blow her own brains out right here and now.

She stared at the machine pistol in her heavy rubber-gloved hand, weighing her options. Then, after another moment, she did what she always did. She pulled herself the hell together and nodded to her right-hand man, Estefan. Two muffled coughing sounds ripped the warm quiet as he blew off the hinge bolts of the iron walkway gate beside the driveway with a suppressed shotgun.

"Remember, now. No guns unless completely necessary," Vida said through the face mask's built-in microphone as one of the men handed her a small video camera. "You all know why we are here. We are here to leave a message."

One by one, the men nodded. The only sound now was that of their breathing from the interior speakers, an amplified metallic, metronomic hiss. Vida turned on the camera and pointed it at the men as they poured through the open gate and converged on the darkened house.

TWO

THREE THOUSAND MILES EAST of balmy Serra Retreat, it was cold and raining along the still-dark shore of southwestern Connecticut. Downstairs, in his basement workout room, Michael Licata, recently appointed don of the Bonanno crime family, was covered in sweat and grunting like a Eurotrash tennis pro as he did his Tuesday kettle-bell workout.

As he felt the burn, Licata thought it was sort of ironic that out of all the rooms in his new, \$8.8 million mansion on the water in moneyed Westport, Connecticut, he liked this unfinished basement the best. The exposed studs, the sweat stains on the cement, his weights and beat-up heavy bag. Pushing himself to the limit every morning in this unheated, raw room was his way of never forgetting who he was and always would be: the hardest, most ruthless son of a bitch who had ever clawed his way up from the gutter of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

The short and stocky fifty-year-old dropped the forty-pound kettle bell to the concrete floor with a loud crack as he heard the intercom buzz on the basement phone. It was his wife, he knew from bitter experience. Not even six-thirty a.m. and already she was on his case, wanting some bullshit or other, probably for him to pick up their perpetually late housekeeper, Rita, from the train station again.

And he'd imagined that by working from home instead of from his Arthur Avenue social club in the Bronx, he could get more done. *Screw her*, he thought, lifting the bell back up. The man of the house wasn't taking calls at the moment. He was freaking busy.

He was stretched out on the floor, about to do an ass-cracking exercise called the Turkish get-up, when he looked

up and saw his wife. She wasn't alone. Standing there in the doorway with her was his capo and personal bodyguard, Ray "The Psycho" Siconolfi.

Licata literally couldn't believe his eyes. Because how could it be possible that his stupid wife would bring Ray here, into his sanctuary, to see him shirtless and sweating like a hairy pig in just his bicycle shorts?

"You're kidding me, right?" Licata said, red-faced, glaring at his wife as he stood.

"It's *my* fault?!" Karen shrieked back at him, like his very own silk-pajama-clad witch. "You don't answer the frigging phone!"

That was it. Licata turned like a shot-putter and slung the kettle bell at her. Before she could move, the forty-pound hunk of iron sailed an inch past her ear and went right through the Sheetrock, into the finished part of the basement, popping a stud out of the frame on the way. She moved then, boy. Like a scalded squirrel.

"This better —" Licata said, staring death up into his six-foot five-inch bodyguard's eyes, "and, Ray, I mean *better*—be fucking good."

Ray, ever expressionless, held up a legal-sized yellow envelope.

"Somebody just left this on the gatehouse doorstep," Ray said, handing it to him. "I heard a truck or something, but when I came out, it was gone."

"What the—? Is it ticking?" Licata said, shaking his head at him.

"C'mon, boss. Like you pay me to be stupid?" Ray said, hurt. "I fluoroscoped, as usual. It looks like a laptop or something. Also, see, it's addressed to you, and the return address says it's from Michael Jr. I wouldn't have bothered you except I called Mikey's phone, and there's no answer. Not on his cell. Not on his house phone."

"Michael Jr.?" Licata said, turning the envelope in his large hand. His eldest son, Michael, lived in Cali now, where he

ran the film unions for the family. Teamsters, cameramen, the whole nine. What the heck was this?

He tore open the envelope. Inside was, of all things, an iPad. It was already turned on, too. On the screen was a video, all set up and ready to go, the Play arrow superimposed over a palm-tree-bookended house that was lit funny. There was a green tinge to it that Licata thought might have been from some kind of night-vision camera.

The green-tinged house was his son's, he realized, when he peered at the terra-cotta roof. It was Michael Jr.'s new mansion in Malibu. *Someone's surveilling Mikey's house? The feds, maybe?* he thought.

"What is this shit?" Licata said, tapping the screen.

THREE

THE FILM BEGAN WITH the shaky footage of a handheld camera. Someone wasn't just filming Mikey's house, either—they were actually past his gate, rushing over his front lawn! After a moment, sound kicked in, an oxygen-tank sound, as if the unseen cameraman might have been a scuba diver or Darth Vader.

Licata let out a gasp as the camera panned right and what looked like a team of ninjas in astronaut suits came around the infinity pool and went up the darkened front steps of Mikey's house. One of the sons of bitches knelt at the lock, and then, in a flash, his son's thick wood-and-iron mission-style door was swinging inward.

Licata's free hand clapped over his gaping mouth as he noticed the guns they were carrying. It was some kind of hit! He was watching his worst nightmare come true. Someone was gunning for his son.

"Call Mikey! Call him again!" Licata cried at his bodyguard.

When he looked back down at the screen of the tablet, the unthinkable was happening. The double doors to his son's upstairs master bedroom were opening. Licata felt his lungs lock as the camera entered the room. He seriously felt like he was going to vomit. He'd never felt so afraid and vulnerable in his entire life.

The camera swung around crazily for a second, and when it steadied, the scuba-masked hit team was holding Mikey Jr., who was struggling and yelling facedown on the mattress. Two of them had also grabbed Mikey's hugely pregnant wife, Carla. She started screaming as they pinned her by her wrists and ankles to the four-poster bed.

There was a sharp popping sound, and then the screen showed a strange metal cylinder, a canister of some kind. Billowing clouds of white smoke began hissing out as it was tossed onto the bed between his son and daughter-in-law.

Tear gas? Licata thought woodenly. They were tear-gassing them? He couldn't put it together. It made zero sense. What the fuck was this? Some kind of home invasion!? He felt like he was in a dream. He wondered idly if he was going into shock.

Mikey Jr. started convulsing first. The astronaut-suited bastards let him go as he started shaking like he was being electrocuted. After a moment, he started puking violently, with a truly horrendous retching sound. Then Carla started the same horror-movie shit, shaking and shivering like bacon in a pan as snot and puke loudly geysered out of her like they did from the girl in *The Exorcist*. The whole time, the camera was panning in and out as a hand moved blankets and sheets out of the way to make sure to get up-close, meticulous footage.

Ten, maybe fifteen seconds into the truly bizarre and hellish spasming, they both stopped moving.

Licata stood there, staring at the screen, unable to speak, unable to think.

His son Michael, the pride of his life, had just been killed right before his eyes.

"Oh, shit, boss! Boss, boss! Look out!" Ray suddenly called.

Licata looked up from the screen.

And dropped the electronic tablet to the cement with a clatter.

The mobster didn't think his eyes could go any wider, but he was wrong. Out of nowhere, two guys were suddenly standing in the doorway of his workout room, holding shotguns. They were Hispanic—one Doberman lean, the other one squat. They were wearing mechanic's coveralls and Yankees ball caps, and had bandannas over their faces.

Without warning, without a nod or a word, the shorter guy with the acne shot Ray in the stomach. Licata closed his eyes and jumped back at the deafening sound of the blast. When he opened his eyes again, there was blood all over the small room—on the heavy bag, on the raw concrete walls, even on Licata’s bare chest. Incredibly, Ray, with his bloody belly full of buckshot, kept his feet for a moment. Then the big man walked over toward the weight bench like he was tired and needed to sit down.

He didn’t make it. He fell about a foot before the bench, facedown, cracking his forehead loudly on one of Licata’s dumbbells.

Licata slowly looked from his dead bodyguard to the two silent intruders.

“Why?” Licata said, licking his suddenly dry lips. “You killed my son. Now Ray. Why? Who are you? Why are you doing this? Who sent you?”

There was no response from either of them. They just stared back, their doll’s eyes as flat and dark as the bores of the shotguns trained on his face. They looked like immigrants. Mexicans or Central Americans. They didn’t speak English, Licata realized.

Suddenly, without warning, two sounds came in quick succession from upstairs: a woman’s piercing scream, followed quickly by the boom of a shotgun.

Karen! Licata thought as he screamed himself, rushing forward. But the Doberman guy was waiting for him. With a practiced movement, he smashed the hardened plastic of the shotgun’s butt into Licata’s face, knocking him out as he simultaneously caved in his front teeth.

FOUR

IT WAS TEN OR so minutes later when Licata came to on the floor of the basement's tiny utility closet. After spitting his two front teeth from his ruined mouth, the first thing he noticed was that he was cuffed to the water pipe.

Then he noticed the terrible whooshing sound and the rank stench of sulfur.

He glanced through the half-open closet door and saw a severed yellow hose dangling between two of the tiles in the drop ceiling. It was the gas line, Licata realized in horror. *Oh, God, no.*

Licata went even more nuts when he saw what was sitting on the coffee table halfway across the long room. It was a large, white bath candle.

A large, *lit* white bath candle.

"Mr. Licata? Yoo-hoo? Are you there? Hello?" said a French-accented voice beside the doorway.

Licata kicked the closet door open all the way, expecting someone to be there. Instead, sitting on a tripod just outside the closet was a massive plasma TV with a whole bunch of cords and some kind of video camera attached to the top of it.

And on the TV screen itself, in super high definition, waved the Mexican drug-cartel kingpin Manuel Perrine.

Licata sat and stared, mesmerized, at the screen. The handsome, light-skinned black man was wearing a white silk shirt, seersucker shorts, a pair of Cartier aviator sunglasses. He was sitting Indian-style on a rattan chaise longue, drinking what looked like a mojito. There was a long, lean woman in a white bikini on the chaise beside him, but Licata couldn't see her face, just the tan, oiled line of her leg and

hip, the toss of white-blond hair on her cinnamon shoulder. They were both barefoot. It looked like they were on a boat.

Licata groaned as his scrambling thoughts began catching traction. About a year ago, Licata had met Perrine in the fed lockup in Lower Manhattan, and for the princely sum of \$10 million cash, he had helped the Mexican cartel head escape from federal custody. *But does he go away and leave me alone?* Licata thought. *Of course not.* The multilingual maniac calls him up a mere two months after his world-famous escape and insists on working together. Like he needed that kind of heat.

As Licata watched, a beautiful four- or five-year-old dusky girl with light-blue eyes filled the screen. Her cornrowed hair was wet, the sequins of her bright-teal bathing suit twinkling.

“Who’s the funny man, Daddy?” the little girl said as she squatted, peering curiously at Licata.

“Back in the pool now, Bianca. I want you to do two laps of backstroke now,” Perrine said lovingly from behind her. “Daddy’s just watching a grown-up show.”

Licata watched the girl shrug and walk offscreen.

“What do you think of this TV setup? Amazing clarity, yes?” Perrine said, removing his sunglasses to show his sparkling light-blue eyes. “It’s called TelePresence, the latest thing from Cisco Systems. It’s costing me a small fortune, but I couldn’t help myself. I couldn’t pass up the opportunity to see and speak with you one last time.”

Licata opened his mouth to say something, then suddenly found himself weeping.

“Tears, Mr. Licata? Seriously? You of all people know perfectly well that men in this world fall into two categories, tools or enemies. You refused to work with me. What did you think was going to happen?”

Perrine took a sip of his drink and wiped his lips daintily with a napkin before he continued.

“It’s not like I didn’t give you a chance. I offered friendship, remember?” he said. “A mutually beneficial partnership. I explained to you how the world was changing. How I could help you and the American Mafia to weather that transition. In earnest I said these things.

“Do you remember what you said before you hung up on me? It was rather humorous. You said that instead of working with your organization, my Mexican friends and I ought to, and I quote, ‘go back and do what you’re good at: washing dishes and cutting grass.’ ”

He brushed an imaginary speck from the shoulder of his pristine silk shirt.

“Mr. Licata, as you see now, my people aren’t the type that do dishes, and instead of grass, the only things we cut are heads.”

“You’re right,” Licata said, blood from his wrecked mouth flecking the cement floor. “I was wrong, Manuel. Way, way off base to disrespect you like that. I see how serious a player you are. We can help each other. I can help you. We can work it out.”

Perrine laughed as he slipped his shades on and leaned back.

“ ‘We can work it out’?” he said as he put his hands behind his head. “You mean like the famous Beatles song, Mr. Licata? That’s precisely the problem. There’s no time, my friend.”

“But —” Licata said as the downward-flowing gas finally touched the candle flame.

Then Licata, his basement, and most of his obnoxious Connecticut McMansion were instantly vaporized as five thousand cubic feet of natural gas went up all at once in a ripping, reverberating, ground-shuddering blast.

PART ONE
DON'T FENCE ME IN

CHAPTER 1

AWAKE AT FIVE O’CLOCK in the morning and unable to sleep with all the incessant peace and quiet, I pushed out through the creaky screen door onto the darkened porch, clutching my morning’s first coffee.

Dr. Seuss was right on the money, I thought with a frown as I sat myself beside a rusting tractor hay rake.

“Oh, the places you’ll go,” I mumbled to the tumbleweeds.

The porch rail I put my feet up on was connected to a ramshackle Victorian farmhouse a few miles south of Susanville, California. Susanville, as absolutely no one knows, is the county seat of Northern California’s Lassen County. The county itself is named after Peter Lassen, a famous frontiersman and Indian fighter, who, I’d learned from my daughter Jane, was murdered under mysterious circumstances in 1859.

As a New York cop forced into exile out here in the exact middle of nowhere for the past eight months, I was seriously thinking about asking someone if I could take a crack at solving Lassen’s cold case. That should give you some indication of how bored I was.

But what are you going to do?

Bored is better than dead, all things considered.

I was sitting on an old wooden chair that we called an Adirondack chair when I was a kid, but that I guess out here was called a Sierra chair, since I could actually see the northern, snow-tipped rim of the Sierra Nevada from my porch. It was cold, and I was sporting, of all things, a Carhartt work coat, worn jeans, and a pair of Wellington boots.

The wellies, knee-high green rubber boots, were perfectly ridiculous-looking but quite necessary. We were living on a

cattle ranch now, and no matter how hard you tried not to, you often stepped in things that needed hosing off.

Yeah, I'd stepped in it, all right.

Mere months ago, I'd been your typical happy-go-lucky Irish American NYPD detective with ten adopted kids. Then I arrested Manuel Perrine, a Mexican drug-cartel head. Which would have been fine. Putting drug-dealing murderers into cages, where they belonged, happened to be an avid hobby of mine.

The problem was, the billionaire scumbag escaped custody and put a multimillion-dollar hit out on me and my family.

So there you have it. The feds put us in witness protection, and I'd gone from *NYPD Blue* to *Little House on the Prairie* in no time flat. I'd always suspected that "luck of the Irish" was a sarcastic phrase.

If I said I was settling in, I'd be lying. If anything, I was more amazed now at our bizarre new surroundings than on the day we arrived.

When people think of California, they think of surfboards, the Beach Boys, Valley girls. That's certainly what I and the rest of the Bennett clan all thought we were in for when the feds told us that was where we were headed.

But what we actually ended up getting from the witness protection folks was the other California, the one no one ever talks about. The northern, high-desert boondocks California, with log cabins left behind by settlers turned cannibals, and cow pies left behind by our new, bovine neighbors.

But it wasn't all bad. The eight-hundred-acre ranch we were now living on was surrounded by devastatingly majestic mountains. And our landlord, Aaron Cody, fifth-generation cattle rancher, couldn't have been nicer to us. He raised grass-fed cattle and organic you-name-it: eggs, milk, veggies, which he constantly left on our doorstep like

some rangy, seventy-five-year-old cowboy Santa Claus. We'd never eaten better.

From my kids' perspective, there was a definite mix of emotions. The older guys were depressed, still missing their friends and former Facebook profiles. With the younger crowd, it was the opposite. They had fallen in love with farm life and all the animals. And, boy, were there a lot of them. Cody had a veritable zoo half a mile back off the road: horses, dogs, goats, llamas, pigs, chickens.

Our nanny, Mary Catherine, who had grown up on a cattle farm back in Ireland, had hit the ground running. She was in her element, always busy either with the children or helping out our landlord. Cody, a widower, who was obviously head over heels in love with Mary Catherine, said he'd never had a better or prettier hired hand.

And we were safe up here. One thing it's hard to do to someone who lives half a mile off a main road in the middle of the wilderness is sneak up on them.

At times, I probably could have committed a felony for a real slice of pizza or a bagel, but I was trying to look on the bright side: though the nineteenth-century lifestyle certainly took some getting used to, at least when the dollar collapsed, we'd be good.

So here I was, up early, out on the porch drinking coffee like your classic western men of yore, looking around for my horse so I could ride the range. Actually, I didn't have a horse or know what "the range" was, so I decided to just read the news on my iPhone.

Beavis and Butt-Head were coming back, I read on the Yahoo! news page. Wasn't that nice? It was a real comfort to know that the world out beyond the confines of my eight-hundred-acre sanctuary was still going to hell in a gasoline-filled recyclable shopping bag.

It was what I spotted when I thumbed over to the *Drudge Report* that made me sit up and spill coffee all over my wellies.