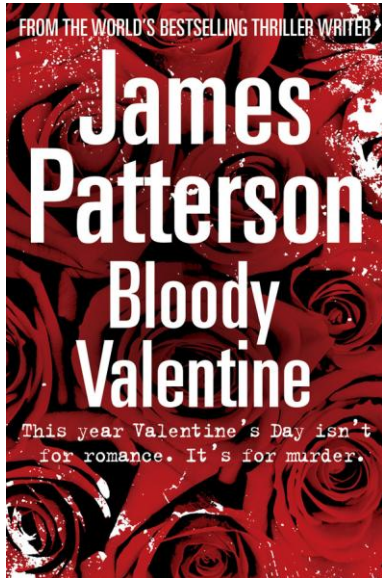


Quick Reads

Great stories, great writers,
great entertainment

***Bloody Valentine* by James Patterson**



Mega-rich restaurant owner Jack Barnes and his second wife Zee are very much in love. However, their plans for Valentine's Day are about to be torn apart by the most violent murder. Who is the strange figure plotting this sick crime? Who hates Jack that much? There are plenty of suspects living in Jack's fancy block of flats. Is it them, or could it be the work of an outsider with a twisted mind? One thing's for sure, the police have got their work cut out solving this bloody mess.

This gory murder mystery will make you feel weak at the knees.

Ten new Quick Reads titles are published on World Book Day, 3 March 2011. They include:

- *Clouded Vision* by **Linwood Barclay** (Orion)
- *Strangers on the 16:02* by **Priya Basil** (Transworld)
- *Jack and Jill* by **Lucy Cavendish** (Penguin)
- *Men at Work* by **Mike Gayle** (Hodder)
- *My Dad's a Policeman* by **Cathy Glass** (HarperCollins)
- *Trouble on the Heath* by **Terry Jones** (Accent Press)
- *Tackling Life* by **Charlie Oatway** (Transworld)
- *Follow Me* by **Sheila O'Flanagan** (Headline)
- *Bloody Valentine* by **James Patterson** (Random House)
- *Kung Fu Trip* by **Benjamin Zephaniah** (Bloomsbury)

The books cost just £1.99 and are available from supermarkets, bookshops and to download as e-books via www.quickreads.org.uk

Quick Reads is a World Book Day initiative. Find out more at www.quickreads.org.uk

Brush up on your maths and English with BBC Skillswise. The first chapters of this year's books are free to download and listen to on the Skillswise website. Go to www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise

BLOODY VALENTINE

Chapter One

'Killing isn't murder when it's necessary.'

The figure, dressed in black, lying on the bed, believed it. The killing that had taken so much planning would benefit more people than it would hurt. So it wouldn't be murder.

The killer listened to the faint roar of London traffic that the triple-glazed windows failed to mute, and watched the figures change on the digital clock. 2.00 a.m., 2.01 a.m., 2.03 a.m., 2.04 a.m. . . .

The click of the clock and a distant steady breathing were the only sounds apart from the traffic. The sleeping pills in the bedtime drink had worked. No one else was awake.

At 2.10 a.m. the night porter, Damian Clark, would pocket the intercom receiver. He'd leave the foyer and take his break in his studio flat in the basement. His routine hadn't varied in the six weeks that the killer had watched him.

The cameras would record, but Damian wouldn't be watching the screens above the porter's desk. It was the perfect time. With care there'd be nothing to be seen on the tapes, because the killer knew the exact angle of the cameras, where they recorded and where they didn't.

Damian's absence was an extra safety measure.

The street doors were locked. No one could enter Barnes Building without summoning Damian on the intercom and who was going to call between two and three in the morning?

No resident could enter one apartment from another unless they had the master key code. The day porter, Ted, had been stupid. When he'd been given the job three months ago, he'd written down the code and left it on a notepad on the desk.

At 2.10 a.m. the figure rose from the bed and glanced in the mirror. All that could be seen was a black shadow in the darkness. The only glimpse of colour was in the eyes shining through the slits in the ski mask. Thin latex gloves were snapped on. The pencil torch was in the trouser pocket. The bag packed.

Time to go.

The layout was the same in all the apartments except the penthouse. The front door opened into a hall. There was a kitchen on the left, a living room that opened on to a balcony straight ahead, bedrooms and bathrooms on the right. Snuffles and heavy breathing came from behind the second bedroom door. The killer listened at the outer door before opening it and creeping out into the corridor.

The kitchen surfaces gleamed, smelling of antiseptic, as a chef's kitchen should.

The knives were in the block. A chopper to cut through bone. A filleting knife to loosen organs. A carving knife to sever muscle. The two-pronged fork was hanging above the cooker. All were placed in the bag. Back to the hall. Listen at the door. Was it imagination, or was there a sound in the corridor?

Open the door slowly. Deep breath to steady nerves. Back into the corridor, crawling low to avoid the lens of the CCTV camera.

The building hummed with night noises. The heating whirred. The low-wattage light bulbs buzzed. Water ran in the communal utility room as a night load washed.

No one slept in the artists' studio. The plumbing under the sink was plastic, push fit. A stab with a sharp penknife split the joint. Water began to drip, enough to make a small pool by morning. It would claim the day porter's attention for an hour or two.

The stairs behind the fire doors were concrete. They led up to the penthouse roof terrace and down to the cellar car park. There were cameras trained on the outside doors. One was at the cellar car park level, another was on the roof. Nothing between.

It was easy to crawl below the red-eyed beam of the CCTV, reach up, and key in the master code. The door clicked. The killer crept forward and crawled into the secret place.

There was a light but no windows. Shelves were bolted to the walls – waist high on one side, shoulder height on the other. The secret place was small, but there was room to move around.

Chains had been wound around the shelf at waist height. Leather straps fastened to the links at measured points. Straps that would fasten ankles, knees, hips, waist, arms, wrists and neck securely to the shelf.

The killer turned to the shelves on the other side and emptied the bag except for a can of spray paint. The chef's knives and the two-pronged fork were set out in a row, steel blades gleaming in the electric light. There was a roll of red satin ribbon and a sheet of pink-heart gift wrap, a plastic box, and a white cardboard box, with a printed address label and a plastic flag.

Next to them the killer laid the stun gun that looked like a mobile phone, bought in Florida and smuggled back through Gatwick. It was illegal to buy stun guns in Britain.

'Killing isn't murder when it's necessary.'

The killer spoke the words aloud. One final check before leaving, closing and locking the door. A quick spray of paint. It was a second coat. The paint was invisible, difficult to check. Back to the corridors in the building, then returning to the apartment, avoiding CCTV cameras, moving as slowly and carefully as on the journey down. Home! The lock clicked. The sound was loud. A cry tore through the air from behind a bedroom door. The killer froze.

Other Resources



Skillswise is the BBC website for adults who want to improve their basic skills in reading, writing and maths. Skillswise aims to become a thriving web community of learners and tutors.

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise

Don't get by  0800 66 0800

Free courses are available for anyone who wants to develop their skills.

You can attend the courses in your local area.

If you'd like to find out more, phone 0800 66 0800.

<http://geton.direct.gov.uk>



For more information on developing your basic skills in Scotland, call The Big Plus free on 0808 100 1080 or visit

www.thebigplus.com



Join the Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge at www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

www.readingagency.co.uk



Publishers Barrington Stoke (www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)
and New Island (www.newisland.ie)
also provide books for new readers