

JAMES
Patterson

AND

MIKE
Lupica



THE HOUSE OF
MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY

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HOUSE OF
WOLVES**

**James Patterson
& Mike Lupica**



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About the Authors

For Jack P. Go, Badgers! Go, Brown Bears!

—J.P.

*For the Lupica boys, Christopher and Alex and Zach. The best seat
for watching pro football has always been with them.*

—M.L.

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

One

ALONE ON HIS BOAT and half drunk, the Golden Gate Bridge off to his left and Alcatraz dead ahead, Joe Wolf started to sing about having left his heart in San Francisco.

Then he suddenly threw back his head and laughed, remembering the last time he'd belted out the song, with his second wife out here on *The Sea Wolf*, both of them knowing the marriage was over.

"*What* heart?" she'd said.

Oh, he had heart, all right, and brains and balls to go with it. How did she think he ended up with his own football team and his own newspaper—by winning the goddamn lottery? He apologized to nobody, not even for the deals he'd had to cut to get what he wanted, especially when he felt, as he did tonight, as if he owned the whole city.

Did he have secrets? Who the hell didn't have secrets? And regrets. He never talked about his biggest secret, but his biggest regret was his family. It was the way his three sons had turned out, the way they'd disappointed him. His fault? Or theirs?

Then there was his only daughter.

She was the best of them, the rising star of the family. Only she'd turned her back on him. And in that way became the biggest disappointment of all.

"I'm not like the rest of you!" she'd said the last time they fought.

Was that fight earlier this year or last year? There were so many he'd lost track. But that was when she told him she was walking away for good, and she meant it this time.

No, he thought. You were supposed to be better.

He drank Grey Goose out of the bottle. The good stuff. But worth it because he was.

Hardly any wind tonight, though. No other boats anywhere in sight, just the smell of the water and the occasional screech of California gulls, the night shining with starlight—bright enough, Joe Wolf thought, to light Wolves Stadium.

His stadium, even if it was too old now, the way they said he was.

He raised the bottle to his lips, realized it was empty, was about to go below and open another one when he heard a noise behind him.

Turned and saw who was standing there.

Shit.

Had to have been hiding below when Joe boarded.

"You?" Joe Wolf said.

"Me."

"What the hell do you want?"

"To ask you a question."

"So ask."

"Simple question, really."

"From you or him?"

"It doesn't really matter."

"Then get to it already," Joe Wolf said. "I'm not getting any younger."

"Did you think we'd wait forever for you to give up?"

“That’s it? You came all the way out here to ask me a question you should already know the answer to?”

“Pretty much.”

The boat had been at rest, rocking gently, the night suddenly still except for the lap of the water against the hull, the gulls having gone silent.

Joe Wolf turned toward the wheel now, ready to start the diesel back up and head back, his evening shot just like that.

“I’ll give up when I’m dead.”

Suddenly the voice was right behind him.

“Fine with me.”

Two

MY STAR QUARTERBACK ROLLED to his right and faked a pass, faked the closest linebacker out of his shoes and nearly his pants, then ran twenty yards untouched to the end zone. If he'd decided to keep going, he could have run untouched all the way to Sausalito.

I blew my whistle and walked toward Carlos Quintera, the linebacker who'd just blown the play. By now the varsity team at Hunters Point High, in the section of town between Hunters Point and Bayview, knew that they weren't playing on one of those teams that ended the season with participation trophies.

I felt a smile forming on my lips. Undergrad at Cal. Stanford Law. And about to read an eighteen-year-old kid the riot act because he'd messed up at a high school football practice.

If I didn't love football as much as I did, I would have asked myself what in the world I was doing here.

"Carlos, we're going to need to get back to basics after that effort. Would that be all right with you?"

"Sure, Coach Jenny."

Still smiling, I held up the ball.

"This," I said to him, "is a football."

"You need to stop right there, Coach," Chris Tinelli, quarterback and captain of the team, said. "Pretty sure you're going too fast for him."

They all laughed. Even Carlos joined in, at least until I told him that we were going to hit the Pause button on today's practice while

he ran five laps around the field.

By now all my players had long since put their teenage male egos, and their jockness, in check enough to allow them to be coached by a woman. And they had been made completely aware, really from our first practice together, that I didn't let shit go.

Inherited trait.

"Five laps, for real?" Carlos said.

"Or ten if we're still having this conversation ten seconds from now."

When practice had started in August for the Hunters Point Bears, they'd treated me like some sort of substitute teacher, thinking they really *could* get away with things, maybe because I was a woman. But it hadn't taken long for me, the political science teacher at Hunters Point, to show them differently.

After today's practice, Carlos walked over to me, helmet in hand, and said, "You know you sound like Bill Belichick when you keep telling us to do our job, right?"

I grinned at him.

"That candy-ass?"

I was the last one on the field, as always, starting to make the long walk toward the back entrance of the school, when I saw what looked like my whole team running at me, the guys still in their pads.

Chris Tinelli was the one who got to me first, out of breath, face red. Eyes red. He had his phone in his right hand.

I never brought my phone with me to practice. Once I got to the field it was all football for me, same as for my players.

"Coach Jenny," he said. "I'm so sorry."

"Chris, what's wrong?"

“Your dad died. It’s all over social media.”

He looked like he might cry. Maybe I would later. Just not now. Not in front of the players. I was the coach. A tough guy.

Another inherited trait.

“How?” I said.

“They say he drowned.”

Three

DANNY WOLF STARED DOWN at the field from the floor-to-ceiling window behind his desk, watching the Wolves practice.

His general manager, Mike Sawchuck, was standing next to him. This was going to be Mike's last year with the Wolves, even if the poor bastard didn't know it yet. Another guy Danny's father had hired who thought he had more tenure than a Supreme Court justice.

"Your dad loved the view from up here when this was still his office," Sawchuck said.

Here we go, Danny thought.

Now he contemplated throwing himself out the window.

"It's not his office anymore," Danny said, "as often as you seem to forget that fact."

"C'mon, Danny Boy. I know who's calling the shots around here now."

Danny Wolf turned to glare at him.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that?"

"Hey, your dad does."

"I rest my case."

"I didn't come up here looking for a fight," Sawchuck said. "We're a team, you and me."

I should fire his ass now.

"Not fighting, Mike," Danny said. "Just explaining. And not to put too fine a point on things, you and I aren't a team. We were *never* a team. You're an employee."

They both watched now as the team's aging quarterback, Ted Skyler, wildly overthrew the team's number one draft choice, DeLavarious Harmon.

Harmon had been wide open behind the defense twenty yards down the field. Skyler threw it thirty, at least. Ted Skyler had stayed around too long; the general manager had stayed around far too long. So had Joe Wolf. Sometimes this place felt like the NFL version of an assisted-living facility.

Sometimes when Mike Sawchuck started to get weepy about the good old days, Danny wanted to throw *him* out the window in front of them.

"Lot of new guys this season," Sawchuck said, desperate to change the subject back to football. "But even if we get off to a slow start, in our division we're still gonna have a shot. I don't see anybody running away with the thing."

"Really. Even with Gramps still under center?"

"Danny," Sawchuck said, "you're the one who wanted to give Ted one more year."

"No," Danny Wolf snapped at Sawchuck. "No, you and my father wanted to give him one more year and convinced me to go along." He put a hand to his heart. "All so we could win one for Joe."

"I thought that's what we all wanted."

"Get over it."

Sawchuck said he was going downstairs to watch the end of practice from the field. As soon as he was out the door, Danny's cell phone rang. He picked it up, saw who was calling.

"Talk to me."

"It's about Joe," the voice said.

Four

JACK WOLF WAS ABOUT to join the afternoon editorial meeting at the *San Francisco Tribune*. He'd decided to hold it in the middle of the city room, a choice he made just often enough to make them think he loved being a newspaperman—and the paper—the way his father had.

All bullshit.

The room had gotten smaller since Joe Wolf had named his second son to succeed him as publisher. But what newspaper outside the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* hadn't gotten smaller? The *Tribune's* print edition on some days looked less substantial than the wine list at Acquerello.

Jack didn't mind that the paper remained a conservative voice in the otherwise liberal city that Joe Wolf liked to call Pelosi-ville. Problem was, Jack Wolf just didn't think it was conservative *enough*. Or loud enough. Or angry enough. Or nearly down and dirty enough. When he and his father fought—and they fought a lot—it was mostly about that. His father kept saying that as long as he was alive, the paper was still going to have standards.

“Whose?” Jack would ask. “Ronald Reagan's?”

Now Jack Wolf turned his chair and put his feet up on the desk closest to him in what they called the bullpen. His managing editor, Megan Callahan, was standing next to him. The other top editors were in a circle in front of them.

“So what do we got?” Jack said.

The Metro editor raised a hand. Rob something. One more kid Jack had hired on the cheap.

“I might have something pretty fresh; check it out.” He handed his phone over to Megan Callahan, who looked down at it and said, “You have *got* to be shitting me.”

She turned back to Rob.

“Is that who I think it is?”

The kid nodded. “In the flesh.” He grinned. “So to speak.”

Megan said, “I didn’t know guys still wore tracksuits like those.”

“They’re like Lululemon for geezers.”

Megan handed Jack the phone. And smiled. On the screen, big as life, was the mayor of San Francisco, Charlie Spooner. Getting ready to step down next year because of term limits and well into his seventies now.

And here he was, big as life, coming out the front door of Precious Orchard massage parlor, on Geary Street.

Jack Wolf’s smile grew.

“God is good.”

“Isn’t the mayor your friend?” Megan said.

“Things change. And by the way, what’s that got to do with anything?”

“Seriously, what do we do with this?”

“What we do,” Jack said, “is put that picture on the front page, underneath type that will make people think the Russians just blew up the Bay Bridge.”

“Don’t you think you should at least run this by your father?”

“You’re right. I should.”

Jack pulled out his phone, punched out a number, waited, put the phone back in his pocket. Smile getting bigger by the moment.

“Oops. Straight to voice mail.”

He stood up now and said to the group, “And if I see this on Twitter before the story goes up on our site later, every one of you is fired. Understood?”

In six months, half the people in the room were going to be gone anyway during the next round of buyouts. Joe Wolf used to dread having to tell people they were being let go. Not his middle son.

“It’s still his paper,” Megan said.

“Not today,” Jack Wolf said.

Ten minutes later, Megan Callahan was bursting into his office. Behind her he could see everybody in the city room staring at the big television set near the bullpen.

“Your father died.”

She told him how and said, “I guess Charlie just got saved from death by front page.”

“Like hell he did,” Jack said.