

The House of CROSS

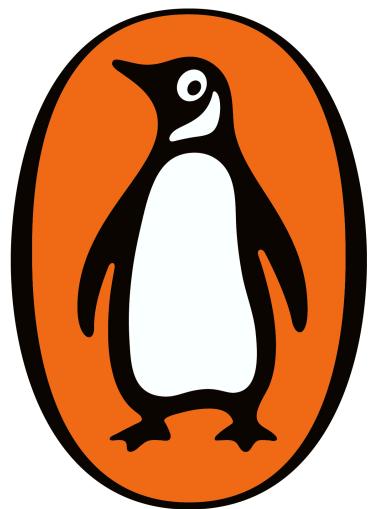
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About the Author

In 1993, James Patterson wrote *Along Came a Spider*, which introduced the world to Alex Cross, a young detective working out of Washington, DC. Since then, every Alex Cross thriller has been an international bestseller. *The House of Cross* is the thirty-second novel in this extraordinary series. James Patterson is the author of other bestselling series, including the Women's Murder Club, Michael Bennett and Private novels. James has donated millions in grants to independent bookshops and has been the most borrowed adult author in UK libraries for the past fourteen years in a row. He lives in Florida with his family.

A list of titles by James Patterson appears at the back of this book

Why everyone loves James Patterson and Alex Cross

‘It’s no mystery why James Patterson is the world’s most popular thriller writer. Simply put: **nobody does it better.**’

Jeffery Deaver

‘No one gets this big without **amazing natural storytelling** talent – which is what Jim has, in spades. The Alex Cross series proves it.’

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Douglas Preston & Lincoln Child

‘Alex Cross is a **legend**.’

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‘James Patterson is **The Boss**. End of.’

Ian Rankin

James Patterson

THE HOUSE OF CROSS



WHO IS ALEX CROSS?

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Alex Cross is 6 foot 3 inches (190cm), and weighs 196 lbs (89 kg).
He is African American, with an athletic build.

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FAMILY HISTORY:

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Cross was raised by his grandmother, Regina Cross Hope - known as Nana Mama - following the death of his mother and his father's subsequent descent into alcoholism. He moved to D.C. from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to live with Nana Mama when he was ten.

RELATIONSHIP HISTORY:

Cross was previously married to Maria, mother to his children Damon and Janelle, however she was tragically killed in a drive-by shooting. Cross has another son, Alex Jr., with Christine Johnson.

EDUCATION:

Cross has a PhD in psychology from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, with a special concentration in the field of abnormal psychology and forensic psychology.

EMPLOYMENT:

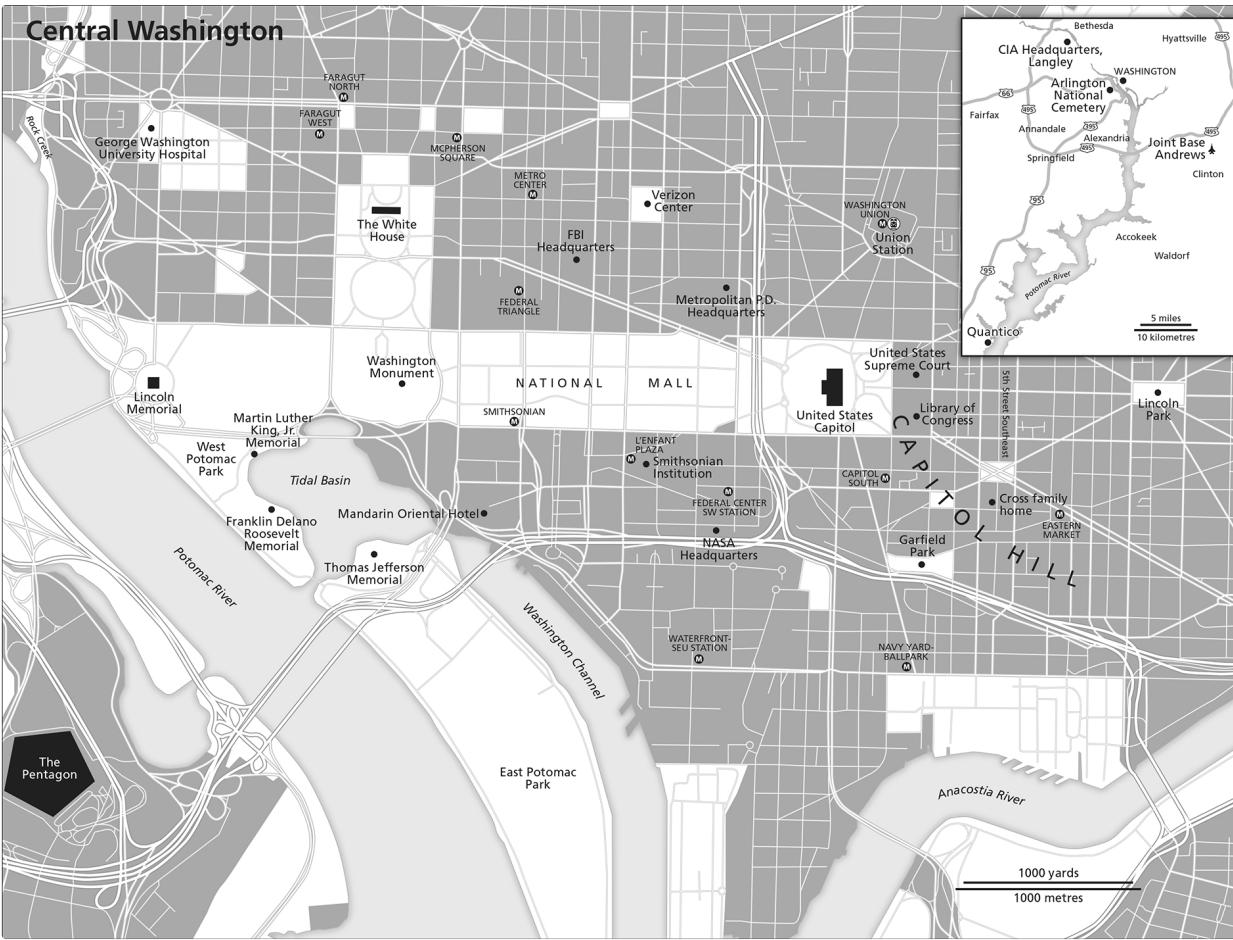
Cross works as a psychologist in a private practice, based in his home. He also consults for the Major Case Squad of the Metro Police Department, where he previously worked as a psychologist for the Homicide and Major Crimes team.

PROFILE

A loving father, Cross is never happier than when spending time with his family. He is also a dedicated member of his community and often volunteers at his local parish and soup kitchen. When not working in the practice or consulting for MPD, he enjoys playing classical music on the piano, reading, and teaching his children how to box.

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Prologue

Potomac, Maryland

MARGARET BLEVINS LOVED HER morning runs. They allowed her time alone, which kept her even-keeled in a beyond-hectic life.

That mid-December morning, the fifty-two-year-old mother of three teenagers followed her normal three-and-a-half-mile route as she ran by headlamp light in the predawn, trying to keep her mind free of thoughts, lost in the delicious feeling of her leg and back muscles warming and firing at the fastest pace in weeks.

For a moment, she regretted slipping out to run without informing her security team. But they always slowed her down, were always fussing, and, my God, she'd been running this route for more than fourteen years, a full thirteen and a half years before she became a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

Justice Blevins felt good enough to pick up the pace a little. And for the first time in a long while, she felt loose and good doing it.

Where's this coming from? Blevins wondered as she approached the entrance to a trail through Watts Branch Park off Lloyd Road. She checked her watch and saw she was three minutes ahead of her usual time.

She glanced up at the sky, already lightening, and felt great, at one with the run.

Still, at the trailhead, she slowed and adjusted the beam of her headlamp so she could better see the bridle path that wound off into the trees.

Blevins bounced into the park on the balls of her feet, amazed again at how good she felt, and trotted into the dawn thinking that there was a particular beauty to the woods in winter, especially this piece of woods. It was a mix of pine and oak and birch, her favorite. There was a stand of birch trees down by the creek that ran through the park.

She realized she was a little early and took a loop that added a few minutes to her run. She could see well enough that she shut off the headlamp, casting the woods in grays and shadows at first. But as Blevins's eyes adjusted, the scene grew lighter, filled with deeper contrasts—the tree trunks against the barest skift of snow on the leaves, the barren crowns against a sky turning rose.

As she'd hoped, the first rays of sunshine were hitting those white birches in the creek bottom when she turned off the loop trail. The air was crisp as she puffed her way toward a tight stand of young hemlock trees growing amid the birches and marking the entrance to a little footbridge that spanned the creek and led to a park bench on the far side. She liked to stretch there before she walked home, part of her cooldown routine.

Blevins could see her breath in the chill air and the sparkle of frost on the birches, and she felt as if all were right in the world as she grabbed the handrails and took two steps up onto the footbridge. She heard an odd noise, a soft thud, coming from that tight group of hemlocks and felt like the side of her head had been slapped.

She felt it most in her ear, hard and painful. She immediately got dizzy and lost her balance.

For a moment, she thought she was going to black out and go down but she held tight to the footbridge railing and did not. After several seconds, the pain in her ear disappeared, the dizziness faded, and her eyes could focus again.

She got her balance back and was able to walk the rest of the way across the little bridge to the bench, although she felt nauseated from the effort. But then the wave of nausea passed too.

Blevins decided not to stretch and, feeling slightly disoriented, started walking home. She knew the trails by heart but got puzzled at two places where side paths met her route.

Once she had them straightened out, however, she found herself thinking more clearly and wondering what had just happened to her.

Was that really a noise back there? Or did I just suffer some kind of attack like Dad? Transient ischemic attacks, that's what Dad's doctor called them. Is that what just happened to me? Aren't I too young?

By the time she left the woods and reached the cul-de-sac where she lived in a large Colonial home set back from the road, she felt absolutely fine and decided not to tell her husband, Phillip. She had a lot on her plate the next

few days and could not afford the time to listen to all the mumbo-jumbo from the doctors and undergo all the tests they'd want to do.

I'm fine, she told herself as she went through the door. Margaret Blevins is just fine.

CHAPTER 1

Independence Mountains, Northern Nevada

COMING DOWN THE ALPINE road in a wheelchair-adapted van with Massachusetts handicap plates, Malcomb felt groggy, still heavy-headed from the drugs, but also anxious and sweaty.

He glanced in his rearview and caught a glimpse of big sections of the dirt road winding along the rim of a canyon that fell away to his left.

Not back there yet, Malcomb thought hazily. But he's coming for you. Expect nothing less now.

He was afraid then and checked the van's large operating screen. He saw on the active navigator that he was on a U.S. Forest Service road, heading north and downhill toward a flat ribbon of highway far in the distance. He glanced right at the little metal wallet and the iPhone on the passenger seat and cursed when he saw no bars on the screen.

Then he checked the gas gauge and was shocked to see he had less than a quarter tank. *That son of a bitch! He wants to limit how far I can go. But screw him. I can make that highway wherever I am. I know I can.*

The road got very steep and twisty just ahead. Unsure of the controls, Malcomb squeezed the handbrake on the steering wheel, glanced in the rearview again, and headed into the first curve. Still nothing behind him.

He made it down through back-to-back S-curves just as snowflakes began to fall from the leaden sky. He hit a short straight, squeezed the gas control, and didn't look at the rearview again until he had to use the brakes to enter another corkscrew.

This time he caught a glimpse of them exiting the upper part of the S, a half mile back.

The blue Tahoe, he thought, trying to breathe, trying to stay calm, trying to tell himself he could make it to the highway.

But with only a quarter of a tank? And what happens after I get there? Will I have cell service? Will anyone believe the story I have to tell?

Malcomb heard a thumping sound. He looked in the rearview and almost lost it. *They've got the helicopter!*

He looked at the cell phone screen again, saw one bar.

“Tor message, Siri,” he said. “Voice.”

“Tor activated,” Siri said. “Recipient?”

“Cross,” he said, glancing again in the rearview but not seeing the chopper. “Alex Cross.”

“Start message on the beep.”

“Dr. Cross,” Malcomb said as he reached the third and final series of S-curves. “There’s a good chance I will not survive. There are things I want to tell you so that you may bring to justice those responsible for my death. First, you know me as—”

The thumping came again, louder this time. Panicked, he accelerated into the first turn of the last S. He came around the apex of the turn, and to his shock the Bell Jet Ranger helicopter rose up out of the depths of the canyon to his left.

The blue and white chopper hovered in the falling snow. The man in the copilot’s seat wore headphones and sunglasses, but he was without a doubt Malcomb’s double.

Then the tail of the bird drifted. There was a man in a harness tethered to the interior roof hanging out the side, one foot on the strut, shouldering a military-style rifle.

Malcomb did the only thing he could think of and squeezed the gas control. The van went shooting out of the first curve in that final S and grazed the canyon wall with the passenger-side door, sending a shower of sparks into the falling snow.

He glanced at the sideview, saw the helicopter turning to follow him. He shouted, “They’re coming for me, Cross. You know my brother, but—”

The helicopter roared up behind him as he reached the last tight turn in the road. He ducked a little, looked in the sideview, and saw the bird coming fast, the gunman hanging out of it.

As he came out of the turn, he saw the road ahead was blocked by a big dump truck with a snowplow. Without thinking, he slammed on the brakes

and tugged hard left on the wheel.

The van smashed into the guardrail going fifty-plus. The bumper caught the rail and hung up on it, causing the rear of the van to catapult up and over.

Malcomb screamed and caught an upside-down image of the bumper tearing free of the rail. The helicopter came into view as the van fell. It caromed off the side of the cliff, plunged another two hundred feet, and hit a pile of rocks.

The gas tank exploded. The wreckage began to burn.

Back up on the cliff, a woman wearing a tan sheriff's uniform and a heavy coat came out from behind the snowplow; she was followed by an older guy in coveralls. They went to the edge and looked down at the van burning, sending black smoke up through the snow.

“Didn’t expect that,” the plow driver said. “But it’ll work.”

The deputy nodded, picked up her radio, clicked the mic button, and looked up at the helicopter swinging away.

“That went easier than we thought, sir,” she said. “And the new snow won’t hurt our cause none.”

CHAPTER 2

Washington, DC

AT SIX P.M. ON a mid-December day, Emma Franklin hurried out of the elevator and down a long hall in the basement of the Prettyman U.S. Court House. The tall forty-six-year-old carried a purse and a leather briefcase and wore a long gray puffy coat over her navy-blue pantsuit.

Franklin pushed through the door into the annex garage and was relieved to see her ride waiting. The driver, a tall redhead in her late thirties, jumped out of the Cadillac town car.

“Good evening, Judge Franklin,” she said, coming around to open the rear passenger door.

Franklin smiled. “How are you, Agnes?”

“Outstanding, ma’am. And you?”

“Just peachy,” the judge said. She climbed in and put her attaché case and purse on the seat beside her.

Agnes closed the door, got in the driver’s seat, and turned on the car. “I don’t hear that expression—‘just peachy’—too often.”

Franklin laughed. “It was something my grandmother used to say.”

Agnes put the car in gear and drove to the exit. “She lived in Georgia, ma’am?”

“Valdosta,” Franklin said. “Pretty place.”

“Had to be warmer than here,” the driver said, pulling by the guard shack and out onto C Street. Snow had begun to fall.

“I heard it’s going to be sixteen degrees tonight,” the judge said, and involuntarily shuddered. “Older I get, the more I can’t stand the cold.”

“I hear you,” Agnes said. She took a right on Third Street and headed south. “Days like today, I’m thinking Miami.”

“I’ll be there for Christmas.”

“Lucky you.”

“My brother bought a place and invited my sisters and their families and me.”

“That’s nice for you. First year after and all.”

Franklin smiled sadly and nodded. “How’s the divorce going, Agnes?”

“I keep telling myself I can see the finish line.”

Judge Franklin looked out the window at the Christmas displays, her mind flickering with memories of the prior December, walking at night in Alexandria, admiring the lights with her late husband, Paul. *What a difference a year makes.*

“What do you think of Sue Winter’s pick for attorney general?” Agnes asked.

Franklin turned, happy for the distraction and change of subject. “She made a solid choice in Malone. Impeccable record when he was U.S. attorney in Phoenix.”

“I was surprised she didn’t pick a woman,” Agnes said.

The judge shrugged. “Sue’s from Arizona and worked with Malone. And State and Defense have already gone to women.”

“I say load the entire cabinet with women. The more the merrier.”

Franklin chuckled. “I like the way you think.”

As they crossed the Fourteenth Street Bridge, the driver asked, “Are you going to the inauguration?”

“Absolutely. Wouldn’t miss it.”

“What about the inaugural balls?”

Franklin looked out the window at the inky darkness of the river. “I haven’t decided if I’m ready for that yet.”

“Understandable, ma’am.”

The judge nodded and looked at her left hand, wondering when the time would be right to take off her wedding band. It had been almost nine months now.

They drove on in silence.

Ten minutes later, Agnes turned onto Franklin’s quiet street in Alexandria.

In the headlights’ glare, through the snowflakes, she saw a powerfully built, short-haired blond woman running down the sidewalk in a warm-up suit with a reflective vest, a neck gaiter, a fleece headband low over orange-

lens safety glasses to block the snow, and one of those hydration backpacks. As they passed her, Franklin saw she wore a headlamp as well.

Agnes pulled into the drive of Franklin's bungalow. "Home again, home again."

Franklin looked at her dark house, said, "Jiggety-jig."

Agnes left the headlights on, came around the back of the car, and opened the door. "Same time in the morning, Judge?"

"Fifteen minutes earlier, please," Franklin said, climbing out with her briefcase and purse.

"Judge Franklin!"

Both the judge and the driver turned to see the blond runner on the sidewalk just a few yards away, her headlamp aimed down and between them. She was squared off in a horse stance, gripping a pistol with a suppressor with both hands. She said something, though Franklin did not catch the words.

"Why are—" Franklin managed before the woman shot her twice, once between the eyes, once over her right eyebrow.

Agnes spun, tried to run. The woman shot her twice between the shoulder blades, then bent over and retrieved the knapsack and the four shell casings from the sidewalk. She stuffed the casings and the gun in the little pack, zipped it up, put it on. She pushed hard against the left side of her neck, felt it crack, and jogged away.

CHAPTER 3

I WAS HOME, FINISHING the dishes, when Ned Mahoney called.

Mahoney was the supervising special agent in charge of an elite FBI unit that worked high-profile investigations. I was a consultant to that unit, focusing on criminal psychology.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“We’re not going to Boston in the morning, Alex.”

“C’mon.” I groaned. “This is the third time we’ve postponed going up there.”

“Yeah, well, we’ve caught a major one. Judge Emma Franklin, only Black woman on the DC Court of Appeals, and her driver were gunned down in Franklin’s driveway in Alexandria about an hour ago. The acting director wants us on it pronto.”

Aaron Gleason, the prior FBI director, had died of a massive stroke two days after the election. The lame-duck president had named Marcia Hamilton, a former U.S. attorney for Chicago, as acting director until the incoming president took office.

“Jesus. Text me the address. I’m on my way.”

I hung up and turned around to see my wife, Bree, standing there with her arms crossed and a scowl on her face. “On your way where? And you’d better say Boston.”

I held up both palms. “This is out of my control.”

“This is the third time we’ve put it off!”

“A District Court of Appeals judge, Emma Franklin, was just gunned down in her driveway and the FBI director wants us there,” I said.

Bree softened. “Franklin? Didn’t her husband die recently in a plane he was piloting?”

I nodded. “Got into wind shear and went down in the Chesapeake last spring.”

“This is going to set the city even more on edge than it already is with the inauguration coming up.”

Before I could reply, my phone buzzed, alerting me to the text.

“Go,” Bree said. “Maybe we’ll get to Boston before the inauguration.”

“We can only hope,” I said, giving her a kiss. “Don’t wait up.”

“Maybe,” she said, and kissed me back.

I left the kitchen and went through the dining room and down the hall, past the front room where Nana Mama, my ninety-something grandmother, was on the couch watching a documentary on rock and roll drummers. My daughter, Jannie, eighteen, a freshman at Howard University, was home after finals and sitting on the couch with her laptop. Ali, my youngest, was on the floor studying a math textbook.

Nana Mama looked over and saw me. “You ever watch this? I guess I never knew how influential Ringo was to generations of drummers.”

“Sounds like a good one, but duty calls,” I said.

My grandmother frowned. “I thought you were going to Boston in the morning.”

“Not anymore,” I said.

“Bundle up, Dad,” Jannie said. “Gonna be freezing tonight.”

“I heard that,” I said. I went to the front hall closet and took out a down jacket, a hat, gloves, and my credentials, then retrieved my pistol in its holster from the lockbox there.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up and parked by an Alexandria police cruiser. A length of yellow tape had been stretched across the road to seal off the crime scene. Despite the cold, there were neighbors out on their porches up and down the street.

Ned Mahoney, a fireplug of a man in his late forties wearing an FBI windbreaker over a heavy jacket, was on the sidewalk in front of the bungalow looking at the bodies. Judge Franklin was on her back, slack-jawed, one bullet hole between her open eyes, another above her right eyebrow. Her briefcase and purse lay beside her.

The driver, who had been identified as thirty-seven-year-old Agnes Pearson of Bowie, Maryland, was sprawled facedown on the driveway, two bullet holes through the back of her black wool overcoat.

The car was still running.

“Pretty sharp shooting even at close range,” Mahoney said.

“Double tapper,” I said. “Casings?”

Mahoney shook his head. "Looks total pro to me."

"Me too," I said. "Who found her?"

"Cop said the lady across the street saw them lying here when she took her dog for a walk. I haven't talked to her yet."

I looked over and saw an older woman dressed for a blizzard sitting on her front porch and smoking a cigarette, a small dog in her lap.

After a criminalist arrived and photographed the scene, we shut the town car off, put on gloves, and went through the judge's purse. We found her wallet, credit cards, two hundred in cash, her cell phone, and the keys to her house.

The briefcase was unlocked. In it was a laptop, legal briefs relating to a case she was hearing, and four tickets to a Miami Heat home game against the LA Lakers on December 23.

"I think we can safely assume they weren't killed as part of a robbery," Mahoney said. "I'm going to go through the car."

"I'll talk to the lady with the dog."

The little black-and-brown shorthair dachshund wore a Christmas sweater and was snuggled in the lap of the smoker. He growled when he saw me approach.

"Hush now, Bernie," the woman said.

"I'm Alex Cross," I said. "I work with the FBI."

"Eileen Dawson," she said, then coughed. "And I know exactly where I'd start if I were investigating this."

"Where's that?"

"George Washington University Law School," she said. "Professor Willa Whelan. She hated Emma's guts, made all sorts of threats against her at a fundraiser at the Hilton not two weeks ago."

"How do you know that?"

"I was an eyewitness."