

JAMES

PATTERSON

J.D. BARKER

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FORGET THE
ENDING...

*A
Thriller*

*The
Writer*

The **Writer**

**JAMES
PATTERSON
J.D. BARKER**



Little, Brown and Company

New York Boston London

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Little, Brown and Company
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
littlebrown.com
X @littlebrown
[Facebook.com/littlebrownandcompany](https://www.facebook.com/littlebrownandcompany)
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First edition: March 2025

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ISBN 978-0-316-57000-8 (hc) / 978-0-316-58462-3 (large print) / 978-0-316-56999-6 (ebook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024946237

E3-20250212-JV-NF-ORI

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

THEN

CHAPTER ONE

Log 10/18/2018 18:58 EDT

Transcript: Audio recording

[Detective Declan Shaw] Maggie Marshall?

[Voice unidentified] Yeah. Fourteen years old. Student at Barrett's Academy. She went—

[Shaw] I know who she is. We've all had eyes out for her since the Amber Alert. Transcriber, for the record, Maggie Marshall was reported missing two and a half days ago by her mother. Last seen leaving school, and she never made it home. She's been all over the news. The whole city's looking. Has she been touched or moved in any way?

[Voice unidentified] No. That's exactly how she was found.

[Shaw] Electrical repair team found her?

[Voice unidentified] Yeah.

[Shaw] Where are they?

[Voice unidentified] We're holding them at Eighty-Sixth Street.

[Shaw] Central Park Precinct?

[Voice unidentified] Yeah.

[Shaw] Okay, give me a little space. [*Clears throat.*] We've had rain the last three nights. She's lying in the mud about a foot off the northeast exterior wall of Blockhouse in Central Park. Severely bloated and discolored from exposure. Same shoulder-length brown hair as in the photo circulated. Do you have positive ID?

[Voice unidentified] We found her backpack in the bushes over there. Student ID card inside, and her name is written in a few of the textbooks. It's her.

[Shaw] We'll confirm ID back at the ME office, but high probability this is Maggie Marshall. Aside from her left sock, she is naked from the waist down. I have eyes on her jeans, other sock, and shoes, all discarded randomly about four feet from her body. Left sock is still in place. Her underwear is twisted around the base of her left foot. The ground immediately around her has been severely disturbed. Even with the standing water, maybe because of it, I can see deep indents on either side of her where it's clear he stood over her. There are also trenches approximately six to eight inches in width both on her sides and between her legs. They appear to be marks left by our unsub's knees. There are obvious signs of struggle—kick marks and gouges in the mud and dirt around her feet and hands, almost like... almost like she tried to dig out from under him.

[*Twelve seconds of silence.*]

I can see clear bruising around her neck consistent with a single hand—right—about the same size as mine. Thumbprint begins about one and a half inches to the left of the hyoid bone with the other four fingers rounding the right side. He used a single-hand grip. There is another large bruise directly above her navel, giving the impression he held her down with his knee. Additional bruising visible on the undersides of her wrists. If he strangled her with his right hand, he most likely pinned both her hands above her head with his left hand as he did it. It's clear from the surrounding ground she put up a struggle, but she didn't stand much of a chance. Both eyes are bloodshot. Petechiae in the right supports strangulation. This is an isolated spot, but why the hell didn't anyone hear her screaming? She must have screamed. [*Sniffle.*] Upon closer examination of her hands, her fingernails are caked with dirt from clawing at the ground. It's possible she scratched her attacker, but

retrieval of trace may prove to be problematic. We've got a mess of footprints. We'll get elimination prints from all first responders and the crew that found her; maybe we'll get lucky.

[*Nine seconds of silence.*]

Where's that backpack?

[Voice unidentified] Over here.

[*Shuffling.*]

[Shaw] Transcriber, confirming for the record we've got a student ID in the front flap of the backpack for Barrett's Academy reading "Margaret Marshall." Three textbooks inside, got some math homework, and a paperback copy of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Library card being used as a bookmark at page ninety-seven also reads "Margaret Marshall."

[Voice unidentified] Detective, you'll want to see this!

[*Shuffling. Eighteen seconds of silence.*]

[Shaw] [*Shouted but muffled.*] Hey, get a few pictures of this before we move it. Up close and at a distance to establish proximity. Get these tracks around it too... [*Unintelligible, then muttered.*] Goddamn rain. We've got a Citizen watch. Old. Tan face with a tachymeter bezel. Brown leather stitched band. Looks like the top pin broke. Fell off the owner's wrist. It's a windup and still ticking, which means it was lost recently. Surrounding tracks appear similar, possibly the same as the ones around Maggie. Fresher, though. With the rain, less than twenty-four hours old.

[Voice unidentified] You think your guy came back?

[Shaw] Maybe he came back to move her or something. Could be he just wanted to revisit. They do that. Based on the tracks, looks like he stood here and... ah, there it is. Cigarette butt. Bag that.

[Voice unidentified] Fucker stood here and smoked?

[Shaw] Looks like it. There's an inscription on the back of the watch. It says "Lucky."

[Second voice unidentified] I think I know who that belongs to.

[Shaw] You do?

[Second voice unidentified] Robert Morter. Head of park services.

[Shaw] You recognize this watch?

[Morter] Not the watch, the name. *Lucky*. We've got a guy on grounds crew who goes by Lucky.

[*End of recording.*]

/MG/GTS