

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLERS



PRESTON
& CHILD

CITY OF
ENDLESS NIGHT

'Sit back, crack open the book and get ready
for the ride of your life.' DAVID BALDACCI

“There are a lot of nicks in the floor.”

“Yes, but *that* one has a small fragment of tissue in it. Our killer took great pains in severing the head without leaving any sign, but it is difficult work and he slipped at one point and made that tiny nick.”

“So where’s the blood? I mean, if the head was cut off here, there’d be at least some blood.”

“Ah! There was no blood because the head was cut off many, many hours or perhaps even days after the victim was shot. She had already bled out elsewhere. Look at that wound!”

“After? How long after?”

“Judging from the retraction of those veins in the neck, I should say at least twenty-four hours.”

“You mean the killer came back and cut off the head *twenty-four hours later*?”

“Possibly. Or else we are dealing with two individuals—who may or may not be connected.”

“*Two perps*? What do you mean?”

“The first individual, who killed and dumped her; and the second...who found her and took her head.”

LIEUTENANT D'AGOSTA PAUSED at the front door of the mansion at 891 Riverside Drive. Unlike the buildings surrounding it, which were gaily hung with Christmas lights, the Pendergast mansion, although in fine shape given its age, was dark and seemingly abandoned. A weak winter sun struggled through a thin cloud cover, casting a watery morning light over the Hudson River, beyond the screen of trees along the West Side Highway. It was a cold, depressing winter's day.

With a deep breath he walked under the porte cochere, stepped up to the front door, and knocked. The door was opened with surprising speed by Proctor, Pendergast's mysterious chauffeur and general factotum. D'Agosta was a bit taken aback by how thin Proctor seemed to have grown since the last time he'd seen him: normally he was a robust, even massive, presence. But his face was as expressionless as usual, and his dress—a Lacoste shirt and dark slacks—characteristically casual for a man supposedly in service.

“Hello, ah, Mr. Proctor—” D'Agosta never knew quite how to address the man. “I'm here to see Agent Pendergast?”

“He's in the library; follow me.”

But he wasn't in the library. The agent appeared, suddenly, in the refectory, dressed in his usual immaculate black suit. “Vincent, welcome.” He extended a hand and they shook. “Throw your coat on that chair.” Proctor, for all that he answered the door, never offered to take a coat. D'Agosta always had the feeling that he was a lot more than a servant and chauffeur, but exactly what he did, and what his relationship was to Pendergast, he could never figure out.

Vincent took off his coat and was about to drape it over his arm when, to his surprise, Proctor whisked it away. As they walked through the refectory and into the reception hall, his eye couldn't help but fall on the vacant marble pedestal, where once a vase had stood.

“Yes, I owe you an explanation,” Pendergast said, gesturing to the pedestal. “I'm very sorry Constance gave you a blow to the head with that Ming vase.”

“Me, too,” said D'Agosta.

“You have my apologies for not providing a reason sooner. She did it to save your life.”

“Right. Okay.” The story still made no sense. Like so much connected with that crazy series of events. He glanced around. “Where is she?”

A severe look gathered on Pendergast's face. “Away.” His icy tone discouraged any further questions.

There was an awkward silence, and then Pendergast softened and extended an arm. “Come into the library and tell me what you've learned.”

D'Agosta followed him across the reception hall and into a warm and beautifully appointed room, with a fire on the grate, dark-green walls, oak wainscoting, and endless shelves of old books. Pendergast indicated a wing chair on one side of the fire and took the opposite one himself. “Can I offer you a drink? I'm having green tea.”

“Um, a coffee would be great, if you have any. Regular, two sugars.”

Proctor, who had been hovering in the entrance to the library, now disappeared. Pendergast leaned back in his chair. “I understand you’ve identified the body.”

D’Agosta shifted. “Yes.”

“And?”

“Well, to my surprise we got a fingerprint match. Popped up almost right away, I presume because she’d been digitally printed when she applied for the Global Entry system—you know, the TSA’s Trusted Traveler Program? Her name’s Grace Ozmian, twenty-three years old, daughter of Anton Ozmian, the tech billionaire.”

“The name is familiar.”

“He invented part of the technology used in streaming music and video over the Internet. Founded a company called DigiFlood. Hardscrabble childhood, but he rose fast. Now he’s rich as hell. Anytime streaming software is loaded on a device, his company gets a piece of it.”

“And you say this was his daughter.”

“Right. He’s second-generation Lebanese, went to MIT on a merit scholarship. Grace was born in Boston, mother died in a plane crash when she was five. She was raised on the Upper East Side, went to private schools, bad grades, never had a job, and sort of lived a jet-setting lifestyle with her father’s money. Went to Ibiza a few years ago, then Mallorca, but about a year ago came back to New York to live with her father in the Time Warner Center. He’s got an eight-bedroom apartment there—two apartments joined together, actually. Her father reported her missing four days ago. He’s been raising holy hell with the NYPD and probably doing the same with the FBI. The guy’s got connections up the wazoo and he’s been calling in all his chips, trying to find his daughter.”

“Undoubtedly.” Pendergast raised the teacup to his lips and took a sip. “Was she involved in drugs?”

“Possible. So many of them are—rich as well as poor. No record, but she was picked up intoxicated and disorderly a couple of times, most recently six months ago. A blood test showed the presence of cocaine in her system. Never charged. We’re putting together a list of everyone she associated with—she had a pretty big crowd of hangers-on. Mostly Upper East Side trust-funders and Eurotrash. As soon as the father’s notified, we’ll be going after her ‘friends’ hammer and tongs. Of course, you’ll be in on all of it.”

Proctor brought in the cup of coffee.

“You mean he doesn’t know yet?” Pendergast asked.

“Ah, no...the ID came in only an hour ago. And that’s partly why I’m here.”

Pendergast’s eyebrows rose, and a look of displeasure gathered on his face. “Surely you don’t expect me to make a sympathy call.”

“It’s not a sympathy call. You’ve done this before, right? It’s part of the investigation.”

“To break the news to this billionaire that his daughter has been murdered and decapitated? No, thank you.”

“Look, it’s not optional. You’ve *got* to go. You’re FBI. We need to show him we’re all over this case and so is the Bureau. If you’re not there, believe me, this superior of yours is going to hear about it—and you don’t want that.”

“I can weather Howard Longstreet’s displeasure. I’m in no mood to leave my library at present on a bereavement mission.”

“You need to see his reaction.”

“You think he’s a suspect?”

“No, but it’s possible the murder could be something involving his business dealings. I mean, the guy *is* supposed to be a world-class prick. He’s ruined many a career, seized lots of companies in hostile takeovers. Maybe he pissed off the wrong people and they killed his daughter to get even.”

“My dear Vincent, this sort of thing is not my forte.”

D’Agosta felt exasperated. He could feel his face burning. Normally he let Pendergast have his way—but this time the man was dead wrong. He was usually so adept at sizing up situations—what the hell was up with him? “Look, Pendergast. If not for the case, do it for me. I’m asking you as a friend. Please. I can’t go in there alone; I just can’t.”

He felt Pendergast’s silvery gaze on him for a long moment. And then the agent picked up his teacup, drained it, and placed it back in its saucer with a sigh. “I can hardly say no to an appeal like that.”

“All right. Good.” D’Agosta stood up, coffee untouched. “But we’ve got to move. That frigging reporter Bryce Harriman is sniffing around like a hound dog. The news could break at any second. We can’t let Ozmian learn about his daughter from a tabloid headline.”

“Very well.” Pendergast turned and there, as if by magic, was Proctor once again, standing in the library doorway.

“Proctor?” Pendergast said. “Bring the car around, if you please.”

THE VINTAGE ROLLS-ROYCE Silver Wraith with Proctor at the wheel—so incongruous in the cramped, pedestrian-clogged labyrinth of Lower Manhattan—squeezed through a traffic jam on West Street and approached the headquarters of DigiFlood, in the heart of Silicon Alley. The DigiFlood campus comprised two large buildings occupying an entire city block among West, North Moore, and Greenwich. One was a massive former printing plant dating back to the nineteenth century, and the other a brand-new skyscraper rising fifty stories. Both, D’Agosta mused, must have killer views of the Hudson River and, in the other direction, the skyline of Lower Manhattan.

D’Agosta had called ahead to say they were coming to see Anton Ozmian, and that they had information about his daughter. Now, as they entered the underground parking garage below the DigiFlood tower, the parking attendant who spoke to Proctor indicated a space directly next to the booth, marked OZMIAN 1. Even before they were out of the car, a man in a dark-gray suit appeared.

“Gentlemen?” He came forward, not shaking hands, all business. “May I please see your credentials?”

Pendergast removed his shield and flipped it open, and D’Agosta did the same. The man scrutinized each one without touching them.

“My driver will stay with the car,” said Pendergast.

“Very well. This way, gentlemen.”

D’Agosta mused that, if the man was surprised to see a cop and an FBI agent arrive in a Rolls, he gave no sign of it.

They followed him into a private elevator adjacent to the parking space, which their escort operated with a key. With a whoosh of cushioned air the elevator rose precipitously, and within a minute it had reached the top floor. The doors whispered open, and they stepped into what was obviously the executive suite. The decorating scheme, D’Agosta saw, was frosted glass, honed black granite, and brushed titanium. The space was Zen-like in its emptiness. The man walked briskly and they followed him across a large waiting area, curved like the bridge of a spaceship, that led to a central pair of birchwood doors that slipped open noiselessly as they approached. Beyond lay a set of outer offices, staffed by men and women dressed in what D’Agosta took to be Silicon Valley casual chic—the black T-shirts and linen jackets with skinny jeans and those Spanish shoes that were all the rage—what were they called? Pikolinos.

Finally they arrived at what D’Agosta guessed was the entrepreneur’s lair itself: another pair of soaring birchwood doors, these so large that a smaller door had been set into one of them for normal comings and goings.

“Gentlemen, please wait here a moment.” The man slipped through the smaller door and closed it behind him.