



Death of an Expert Witness (Adam Dalgliesh)

By P. D. James

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In yet another page-turning installment in the bestselling Adam Dalgliesh mystery series from P.D. James, “the reigning mistress of murder” (*Time*), the Inspector must investigate the murder of a twisted forensic scientist and explore the dark secrets within his laboratory.

When a brilliant forensic scientist is found murdered in his own laboratory, Scotland Yard is called to the scene. The victim, a well-respected, authoritative member of the scientific community, was unpleasant to and greatly disliked by those who worked closest to him, leaving detectives with a wealth of suspects and murderous motives. P.D. James’ beloved detective Adam Dalgliesh is the one man who can sort through the lies, chasing down the truth to the book’s powerful climax.

P.D. James deftly weaves another tale of intrigue in *Death Of an Expert Witness*. Engaging and thrilling, she takes readers along with her troubled detective on a case rife with psychological thrills.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The reigning mistress of murder." (*Time*)

"One of the finest, most absorbing craftsmen of the profession." (*The Washington Post*)

About the Author

P.D. James is the author of twenty previous books, most of which have been filmed and broadcast on television in the United States and other countries. She spent thirty years in various departments of the British Civil Service, including the Police and Criminal Law Departments of Great Britain's Home Office. She has served as a magistrate and as a governor of the BBC. In 2000 she celebrated her eightieth birthday and published her autobiography, *Time to Be in Earnest*. The recipient of many prizes and honors, she was created Baroness James of Holland Park in 1991 and was inducted into the International Crime Writing Hall of Fame in 2008. She lives in London and Oxford.

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Chapter One

The call had come at 6:12 precisely. It was second nature to him now to note the time by the illuminated dial of his electric bedside clock before he had switched on his lamp, a second after he had felt for and silenced the raucous insistence of the telephone. It seldom had to ring more than once, but every time he dreaded that the peal might have woken Nell. The caller was familiar, the summons expected. It was Detective-Inspector Doyle. The voice, with its softly intimidating suggestion of Irish burr, came to him strong and confident, as if Doyle's great bulk loomed over the bed.

"Doc Kerrison?" The interrogation was surely unnecessary. Who else in this half-empty, echoing house would be answering at 6:12 in the morning? He made no reply and the voice went on.

"We've got a body. On the wasteland -- a clunch field -- a mile northeast of Muddington. A girl. Strangulation by the look of it. It's probably pretty straightforward but as it's close..."

"All right. I'll come."

The voice expressed neither relief nor gratitude. Why should it? Didn't he always come when summoned? He was paid well enough for his availability, but that wasn't the only reason why he was so obsessively conscientious. Doyle, he suspected, would have respected him more if he had occasionally been less accommodating. He would have respected himself more.

"It's the first turn off the A142 after you leave Gibbet's Cross. I'll have a man posted."

He replaced the receiver, swung his legs out of bed, and, reaching for his pencil and pad, noted the details while they were still fresh in his mind. In a clunch field. That probably meant mud, particularly after yesterday's rain. The window was slightly open at the bottom. He pushed it open, wincing at the rasp of the wood, and put out his head. The rich, loamy smell of the fen autumn night washed over his face, strong, yet fresh. The rain had stopped and the sky was a tumult of gray clouds through which the moon, now almost full, reeled like a pale, demented ghost. His mind stretched out over the deserted fields and the desolate dikes to the wide, moon-bleached sands of the Wash and the creeping fringes of the North Sea. He could fancy that he smelled its medicinal tang in the rain-washed air. Somewhere out there in the darkness, surrounded by all

the paraphernalia of violent death, was a body. His mind recalled the familiar ambience of his trade: men moving like black shadows behind the glare of the arc lights, the police cars tidily parked; the flap of the screens, desultory voices conferring as they watched for the first lights of his approaching car. Already they would be consulting their watches, calculating how long it would be before he could make it.

Shutting the window with careful hands, he tugged trousers over his pajamas and pulled a polo-necked sweater over his head. Then he picked up his flashlight, switched off the bedside light, and made his way downstairs, treading warily and keeping close to the wall to avoid the creaking treads. But there was no sound from Eleanor's room. He let his mind wander down the twenty yards of landing and the three stairs to the back bedroom where his sixteen-year-old daughter lay. She was always a light sleeper, uncannily sensitive even in sleep to the ring of the telephone. But she couldn't possibly have heard. He had no need to worry about three-year-old William. Once asleep, he never woke before morning.

Actions as well as thought were patterned. His routine never varied. He went first to the small washroom near the back door where his wellington boots, the thick red socks protruding like a pair of amputated feet, stood ready at the door. Pushing up his sleeves over the elbow, he swilled cold water over his hands and arms, then bent down and sluiced the whole of his head. He performed this act of almost ceremonial cleansing before and after every case. He had long ago ceased to ask himself why. It had become as comforting and necessary as a religious ritual, the brief preliminary washing which was like a dedication, the final ablution which was both a necessary chore and an absolution, as if by wiping the smell of his job from his body he could cleanse it from his mind. The water splashed heavily against the glass, and rising to fumble for a towel, he saw his face distorted, the mouth hanging, the heavily lidded eyes half hidden by glistening weeds of black hair like the surfacing visage of a drowned man. The melancholy of the early hours took hold of him. He thought:

"I'm forty-five next week and what have I achieved? This house, two children, a failed marriage, and a job that I'm frightened of losing because it's the only thing I've made a success of." The Old Rectory, inherited from his father, was unmortgaged, unencumbered. This wasn't true, he thought, of anything else in his anxiety-ridden life. Love, the lack of it, the growing need, the sudden terrifying hope of it, was only a burden. Even his job, the territory where he moved with most assurance, was hedged with anxiety.

As he dried his hands carefully, finger by finger, the old familiar worry returned, heavy as a morbid growth. He hadn't yet been appointed as Home Office Pathologist in succession to old Dr. Stoddard and he very much wanted to be. The official appointment wouldn't give him more money. The police already employed him on an item of service basis and paid generously enough for each case. That and the fees for coroner's postmortems provided an income that was one of the reasons why his professional colleagues in the Pathology Department of the district general hospital both envied and resented his unpredictable absences on police work, the long days in court, the inevitable publicity.

Yes, the appointment was important to him. If the Home Office looked elsewhere it would be difficult to justify to the Area Health Authority a continuing private arrangement with the local Force. He wasn't even sure that they would want him. He knew himself to be a good forensic pathologist, reliable, more than competent professionally, almost obsessively thorough and painstaking, a convincing and unflappable witness. The Force knew that their meticulously erected edifices of proof wouldn't fall to pieces under cross-examination when he was in the witness box, although he sometimes suspected that they found him too scrupulous for complete comfort. But he hadn't the easy masculine camaraderie, the blend of cynicism and *machismo* which had bound old Doc Stoddard so strongly to the Force. If they had to do without him he wouldn't be greatly missed, and he doubted whether they would put themselves out to keep him.

The garage light was blinding. The overhead door swung up easily to his touch and the light splayed out over the gravel of the drive and the unkempt verges of silvered grass. But at least the light wouldn't wake Nell. Her bedroom was at the back of the house. Before switching on the engine he studied his maps. Muddington.

It was a town on the edge of his area, about seventeen miles to the northwest, less than half an hour's drive each way if he were lucky. If the laboratory scientists were there already -- and Lorrimer, the Senior Biologist, never missed a homicide if he could help it -- then there mightn't be much for him to do. Allow, say, an hour at the scene, and with luck he would be home again before Nell woke and she need never know that he had been away. He switched off the garage light. Carefully, as if the gentleness of his touch could somehow silence the engine, he turned on the ignition. The Rover moved slowly into the night.

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Users Review

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