

Free Excerpt

The Expendability Doctrine

A thriller by Patrick Mackeown



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CHAPTER 1

Hilary Connors was surprised by just how easy killing somebody could be; like everything else in life, you just had to put your mind to it. She crossed a disused railway line tugging her cream-coloured, baby alpaca coat about her ankles. An East-Anglian sea breeze stung her face. She huddled, pulling her chinchilla collar close around her neck and blew into her hands. She couldn't feel her toes. Suddenly, there he was. He didn't look all that bad for a murderer, perhaps a bit slim, but he had a nice smile.

'You startled me,' she said.

'Force of habit,' he replied. 'People never hear me coming. I wouldn't live long if they did. Now, can we get on with it?'

'Right, yes, sorry,' she said blushing. 'What do you want me to do?'

'First the money: Five thousand now. You got it with you?'

She nodded.

'Then ten thousand: You wait till I contact you. Then a further five thousand. You never contact me, you can't. You pay what I say, how I say, when I say. Nothing happens till I get the money. Got any problems with that?'

She shook her head.

'Never be late. Don't even think about being late or missing a payment. If you make that mistake, you'll never make another. Are we understanding each other?'

She nodded.

'Photograph?'

She pulled the torn wedding photograph from her handbag. He smiled again, running his fingers down the jagged edge of the fragmented image.

'I like that,' he said nodding. 'Have you got a whole photo?'

She shook her head, 'it's the only one. I burned the others, all of them. I burned everything.'

'Where's the other half?'

'I don't know, I threw it away, I think.'

'Where?'

'I don't know, I don't know!'

'OK,' he said softly, 'it's OK.'

They sat for a minute in silence.

'You OK?'

She sniffed, 'yeah, never better.' She wiped her eyes with her wrist. After a few minutes she asked, 'what do I do now?'

'You go home and wait. You'll never see me again. Have you told anyone else about this?'

She shook her head.

'You're sure? No-one at all? Think carefully before you answer. If I have to come back and clean up after your mistakes, it'll mean killing everybody. Do you understand what I'm saying? I don't just mean him. I mean you and whoever it is you told about this.'

Hilary didn't respond. The gunman raised his voice slightly to jog her back to the matter in hand.

'You understand me, Mrs Connors?'

'Yes,' she whispered, 'yes, I understand, I told no-one, absolutely no-one.'

'If I hear my name mentioned anywhere, I'll know it came from you, do you understand what that means?'

She nodded.

'That's it then,' he said.

Hilary walked unsteadily back to her bicycle. She was determined not to look behind her, fearing that it might not be safe. For reasons she couldn't clarify, looking back towards a killer as he prepared his future strike felt more dangerous than sitting beside him while he studied her torn photograph of his next victim.

She hadn't realised how difficult it was to cycle, wearing a full-length coat. It hadn't been a problem earlier, nothing had. She had been concentrating so hard on not being terrified, that she hadn't noticed the

journey at all. Every time she bent down to gather up the hem of her coat, her bicycle wobbled frantically. She longed to be at the wheel of her car.

All the silent roads and empty shopping centre car parks made her ache with desire for the return of normality. The recent sharp petrol price increases had driven many local shopkeepers out of businesses. People were going hungry. The local television news reports brought their stories to her attention before she could change the channel. All over the country petrol stations had run out of fuel. Hilary and all her friends had been reduced to cycling. She didn't really care whether petrol prices came down or not, just as long as she could drive her car and buy clothes.

As she veered towards the brightly lit windows of Liberty, the most expensive store on her route, her right, high-heeled shoe fell off. Breaking, turning and dismounting with only one shoe was difficult. Hilary hated bicycles.

Now her house was almost within walking distance. She dismounted and pushed the bicycle along the eerily deserted street.

In the driveway of her modern, detached house she ran her palm gently over the hood of her convertible Mercedes. She let the bicycle fall into her flowerbed and entered the house. Then, gathering her cat into her arms, Hilary sank into her sofa. She tipped the dregs from a heavy, dimpled-based whiskey tumbler into her kitchen sink, but did not bother to wash the glass. Her house had ice, but she was without the will-power to walk a few feet to her fridge. She measured two fingers into the glass and poured another healthy splash on top for good measure. The first two fingers of gin she knocked back with a single swig. She also measured her next two large mouthfuls. Beyond that, there seemed no point in measuring. The following morning she would have no recollection of drinking from the neck of the bottle. Eventually, when the time came to wake up, she would stagger towards the television, knocking letters and magazines from her occasional table onto the floor with the hem of her coat just as she had the morning before and the one before that. She was a terrible wreck and she knew it. Soon though, for that day at least, she'd be beyond caring.

She switched on her television. Suddenly a terrible fear gripped her. Perhaps she had been seen. Perhaps someone knew that she'd met with a murderer and reported her to the police. Hilary knew such fears were irrational. She knew perfectly well that no-one had seen her. The streets of her town were completely deserted. She drank more alcohol. Her hands were shaking. She turned on the news and tried to focus on her television screen.

CHAPTER 2

In the news report which Hilary forced herself to follow, a full picture of the developing international petroleum crisis emerged. Every single one of Great Britain's streets was deserted. The same was true in every European capital. Cars were silent. And it was clear even to Hilary, whose head swirled as she glugged her way into alcoholic oblivion, that all was not well either in the world of television news. She tried still harder to blot-out her plan of Keith's murder, but regardless of how much she drank the crime wouldn't leave her thoughts.

'We'll bring you this report in a second,' a BBC news woman read out. 'Please be patient.'

Hilary's television screen showed an image of Number Ten Downing Street's famous black front door. It was closed. She waited.

'Here comes the prime minister,' the newsreader announced. 'The government has been in crisis talks all morning. We understand that there are food shortages in several towns and cities. We'll have a statement about law and order, in a moment, from Britain's most senior police officer, but now we go live to the prime minister.'

The leader of Britain's government still did not appear.

'We have more breaking news for you,' the woman in the studio explained as she shuffled sheets of paper and dropped them onto the floor. 'Crude oil prices on the world markets have just risen again for the third time in two days. The situation in the Middle East has now deteriorated even further, and we expect it to get still worse. More fighting has broken out after an unknown number of gunmen opened fire on a convoy of buses travelling to the Israeli enclave of Hebron on the West Bank, inside one of the fledgling Palestinian controlled 'autonomous areas'. Israel, in response to the third terrorist attack in two weeks, conducted a lightning strike against government offices in Syria. No deaths have been reported. Yesterday, the Israeli prime minister accused the Syrian government of supporting terrorist activities. Tony Leadbrook reports.'

There was a silence for several minutes as the reporter scrambled for the Leadbrook recording.

The BBC's international correspondent began, 'analysts widely predict that the United States, already overstretched in Iraq and resented by the Arab world, will exacerbate the situation by supporting the Israeli strikes. The Arabic oil exporters have begun restricting production and raising prices still further. OPEC has given an ultimatum to America; the United States must either stop supporting Israeli massacres, and militarised aggression, or face a complete suspension of oil sales. These are the scenes all over America as panic buying spreads across the country.'

From an American news crew helicopter a cameraman scanned endless queues of cars, baking in the midday sun. People could be seen clearly, fighting on garage forecourts below. The report then showed oil prices on the New York Stock Exchange rising steadily every second. The usually frantic market traders wiped sweat from their faces as they waved their arms and shouted. One market maker in the centre of the camera shot shrugged his shoulders and poured water on his face. He was pushed aside by paramedics as they pulled an exchange floor manager from his office on a stretcher. As the lead paramedic shouted, 'bring me the cardiac defibrillator', the stretcher crashed into the television crew. For a second the view of the exchange floor was inverted, until a trader stood on the camera. For an instant Hilary's television screen went blank as the recording from America was cut off.

The London based BBC news reader continued, 'as we wait to bring you live coverage of the prime minister's address, let's go to our reporter Lesley Anderson for more news on the momentous events at home.'

By now the BBC newsreader had no papers in front of her at all. She clearly did not know what to say next and nobody was helping her.

'I can tell you that the government will not add more taxes onto petrol prices,' she announced, as if she'd just remembered an entirely unconnected fact. As she spoke the door to Number Ten opened and the prime minister walked out briskly into the centre of the road. He looked calm, almost cheerful. For at least two seconds he smiled. Despite herself, Hilary smiled too. And then the government leader began to speak.

'We have made the necessary emergency order in council. I have made absolutely certain that everybody understands we must all do more to improve the fuel situation. I have spoken to the Saudi government and they have assured me that they are seeking to reach a settlement. But there is more we can do here at home.' As he turned to re-enter his official residence, the BBC correspondent called out, 'Prime Minister, isn't it true that the whole world is being held hostage by OPEC? What are the alternatives? Why don't we get Siberian oil supplies from Russia instead?'

'Rest assured, that everything that can be done is being done,' was the curt reply he received, before the British premier disappeared.

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The Expendability Doctrine

Oil tycoon Keith Connors is found dead in the garden of his villa; undoubtedly the work of a pro. His ex-wife flees to Libya, where she is linked to the brutal murder of the White House Trade Representative. In his investigations, Inspector Hawthorne discovers a sinister web of treachery and greed in the international oil business.

The Cardinal's Blood

In June of 1982, in the midst of an Italian financial crisis of epic proportions, the Vatican's most powerful financial advisor, Roberto Calvi, is found hanging by the neck beneath Blackfriars Bridge in London. Subsequent autopsies and investigations prove fruitless. Nevertheless, the ensuing pattern of deaths and disappearances is murderous in the extreme.

Midwinter's Children

Georg, a nine-year-old street child, has been captured by human traffickers from Moscow and is about to be sold to a child pornography ring in Amsterdam. Detective Chief Inspector Hawthorne, from Suffolk CID, is on the case...

Mutilation Murders

The torso of a black child has been discovered in London's Kensington Gardens. Detective Chief Inspector Hawthorne and his men quickly discover that the boy was a victim of a ritualistic killing. At Heathrow airport a second child, Jubulani, and his mother disembark from their plane. On his arrival in London Jubulani is kidnapped. A Ju Ju witchdoctor in South London is preparing the new child, Jubulani, to be sacrificed. Hawthorne is racing against time to save the boy.

The Black Daimler

Nexus, a London-based Chinese dissident, learns that his friend was found with an axe embedded in his head. As more of his politically active associates die, he becomes involved in a frantic struggle to understand and defeat the threat to himself and his organisation.

The Devil's Brothers

Catherine Bronston, a fifteen-year-old girl, is snatched outside her local swimming pool. The kidnappers, ruthless Albanian mafiosi, issue a ransom demand containing dismembered body parts. Catherine's father fears that the ongoing police investigation could reduce the possibility of her being found alive.

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