



Original Sin

By P. D. James

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Commander Adam Dalgliesh and his team are confronted with a puzzle of extraordinary ingenuity as they begin to probe the dark, private tragedies of Etienne's mistress and colleagues. But the mystery at Innocent House may prove too deep, too old, and too evil to stop at just one death....

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Editorial Review

Review

“Brilliant...stellar...elegant.” -- *The Globe and Mail*

“Exquisitely plotted, crammed with excellent characters and Dickensian in its passion for detail and setting.”
-- *The Ottawa Citizen*

From the Paperback edition.

About the Author

P. D. James is the author of twenty-one books, most of which have been filmed for television. 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. The recipient of many prizes and honours, 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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Book One: Foreword to Murder

1

For a temporary shorthand-typist to be present at the discovery of a corpse on the first day of a new assignment, if not unique, is sufficiently rare to prevent its being regarded as an occupational hazard. Certainly Mandy Price, aged nineteen years two months, and the acknowledged star of Mrs Crealey's Nonesuch Secretarial Agency, set out on the morning of Tuesday, 14 September for her interview at the Peverell Press with no more apprehension than she usually felt at the start of a new job, an apprehension which was never acute and was rooted less in any anxiety whether she would satisfy the expectations of the prospective employer than in whether the employer would satisfy hers. She had learned of the job the previous Friday when she called in at the agency at six o'clock to collect her pay after a boring two-week stint with a director who regarded a secretary as a status symbol but had no idea how to use her skills, and she was ready for something new and preferably exciting although perhaps not as exciting as it was subsequently to prove.

Mrs Crealey, for whom Mandy had worked for the past three years, conducted her agency from a couple of rooms above a newsagent and tobacconist's shop off the Whitechapel Road, a situation which, she was fond of pointing out to her girls and clients, was convenient both for the City and for the towering offices of Docklands. Neither had so far produced much in the way of business, but while other agencies foundered in the waves of recession Mrs Crealey's small and underprovisioned ship was still, if precariously, afloat.

Except for the help of one of her girls when no outside work was available, she ran the agency single-handed. The outer room was her office in which she propitiated clients, interviewed new girls and assigned the next week's work. The inner was her personal sanctum, furnished with a divan bed on which she occasionally spent the night in defiance of the terms of the lease, a drinks cabinet and refrigerator, a cupboard which opened to reveal a minute kitchen, a large tele-vision set and two easy chairs set in front of a gas fire in which a lurid red light rotated behind artificial logs. She referred to her room as the "cosy," and Mandy was one of the few girls who was admitted to its privacies.

It was probably the cosy which kept Mandy faithful to the agency, although she would never have openly admitted to a need which would have seemed to her both childish and embarrassing. Her mother had left home when she was six and she herself had been hardly able to wait for her sixteenth birthday when she could get away from a father whose idea of parenthood had gone little further than the provision of two meals a day which she was expected to cook, and her clothes. For the last year she had rented one room in a terraced house in Stratford East where she lived in acrimonious camaraderie with three young friends, the main cause of dispute being Mandy's insistence that her Yamaha motor bike should be parked in the narrow hall. But it was the cosy in Whitechapel Road, the mingled smells of wine and take-away Chinese food, the hiss of the gas fire, the two deep and battered armchairs in which she could curl up and sleep which represented all Mandy had ever known of the comfort and security of a home.

Mrs Crealey, sherry bottle in one hand and a scrap of jotting pad in the other, munched at her cigarette holder until she had manoeuvred it to the corner of her mouth where, as usual, it hung in defiance of gravity, and squinted at her almost indecipherable handwriting through immense horn-rimmed spectacles.

"It's a new client, Mandy, the Peverell Press. I've looked them up in the publishers' directory. They're one of the oldest – perhaps the oldest – publishing firm in the country, founded in 1792. Their place is on the river. The Peverell Press, innocent House, Innocent Walk, Wapping. You must have seen Innocent House if you've taken a boat trip to Greenwich. Looks like a bloody great Venetian palace. They do have a launch, apparently, to collect staff from Charing Cross pier, but that'll be no help to you, living in Stratford. It's your side of the Thames, though, which will help with the journey, I suppose you'd better take a taxi. Mind you get them to pay before you leave."

"That's OK, I'll use the bike."

"Just as you like. They want you there on Tuesday at ten o'clock."

Mrs Crealey was about to suggest that, with this prestigious new client, a certain formality of dress might be appropriate, but desisted. Mandy was amenable to some suggestions about work or behaviour but never about the eccentric and occasionally bizarre creations with which she expressed her essentially confident and ebullient personality.

She asked: "Why Tuesday? Don't they work Mondays?"

"Don't ask me. All I know is that the girl who rang said Tuesday. Perhaps Miss Etienne can't see you until then. She's one of the directors and she wants to interview you personally. Miss Claudia Etienne. I've written it all down."

Mandy said: "What's the big deal then? Why have I got to be interviewed by the boss?"

"One of the bosses. They're particular who they get, I suppose. They asked for the best and I'm sending the

best. Of course they may be looking for someone permanent, and want to try her out first. Don't let them persuade you to stay on, Mandy, will you?"

"Have I ever?"

Accepting a glass of sweet sherry and curling into one of the easy chairs, Mandy studied the paper. It was certainly odd to be interviewed by a prospective employer before beginning a new job even when, as now, the client was new to the agency. The usual procedure was well understood by all parties. The harassed employer telephoned Mrs Crealey for a temporary shorthand typist, imploring her this time to send a girl who was literate and whose typing speed at least approximated to the standard claimed. Mrs Crealey, promising miracles of punctuality, efficiency and conscientiousness, dispatched whichever of her girls was free and could be cajoled into giving the job a try, hoping that this time the expectations of client and worker might actually coincide. Subsequent complaints were countered by Mrs Crealey's invariably plaintive response: "I can't understand it. She's got the highest reports from other employers. I'm always being asked for Sharon."

The client, made to feel that the disaster was somehow his or her fault, replaced the receiver with a sigh, urged, encouraged, endured until the mutual agony was over and the permanent member of staff returned to a flattering welcome. Mrs Crealey took her commission, more modest than was charged by most agencies, which probably accounted for her continued existence in business, and the transaction was over until the next epidemic of 'flu or the summer holidays provoked another triumph of hope over experience.

Mrs Crealey said: "You can take Monday off, Mandy, on full pay of course. And better type out your qualifications and experience. Put 'Curriculum Vitae' at the top, that always looks impressive."

Mandy's curriculum vitae, and Mandy herself – despite her eccentric appearance – never failed to impress. For this she had to thank her English teacher, Mrs Chilcroft. Mrs Chilcroft, facing her class of recalcitrant eleven-year-olds, had said: "You are going to learn to write your own language simply, accurately and with some elegance, and to speak it so that you aren't disadvantaged the moment you open your mouths. If any of you has ambitions above marrying at sixteen and rearing children in a council flat you'll need language. If you've no ambitions beyond being supported by a man or the State you'll need it even more, if only to get the better of the local authority Social Services department and the DHSS. But learn it you will."

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Derek McCaleb:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important usually. The book Original Sin ended up being making you to know about other understanding and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The book Original Sin is not only giving you considerably more new information but also to get your friend when you truly feel bored. You can spend your personal spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship using the book Original Sin. You never sense lose out for everything if you read some books.

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Sharon Brogdon:

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