

# Collision Course

## *Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

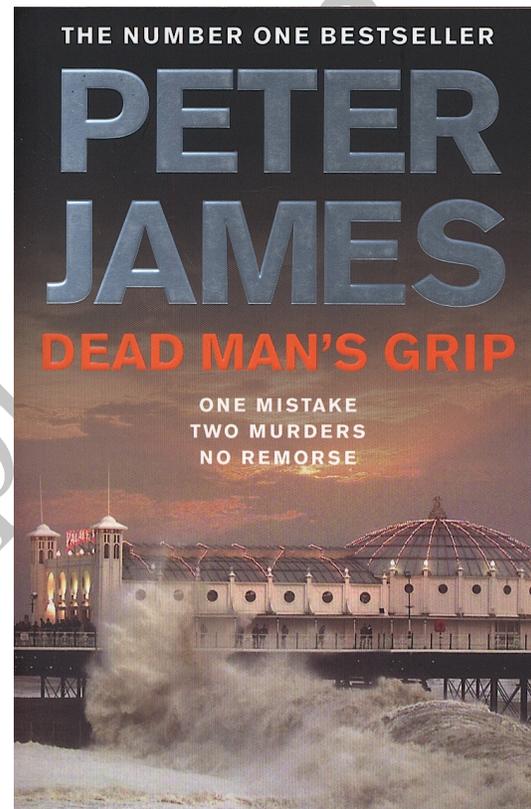
**R**TAs, the British police call them, and investigating Road Traffic Accidents form an important, if gruesome, part of their work. But not all deaths are accidental, and even those that are can trigger a chain of events that leads to further violence, catching up the innocent in their wake. This week's picks involve two very different tales that begin with road deaths and lead the reader through a labyrinth of intrigue. So settle down with either of them (or better yet, both), and prepare to be taken on a wild ride...

### **Peter James, *Dead Man's Grip* (Macmillan, 2011)**

Brighton, Sussex: in the seventh foray in Peter James' highly-successful series featuring Detective Superintendent Roy Grace, the officer finds himself wrestling with two very different crises, one personal, the other professional; both will shake him to the core.

On the domestic front is Grace's ongoing concern for his missing fiancée. Months earlier, and pregnant with their child, Cleo had been hospitalized with complications. After she was released Grace thought their lives were coming back together, but one day Cleo simply disappeared. Her car was found at Gatwick Airport; she had taken no other clothes with her, nor, apparently, any money. Tantalizingly, friends had reported having glimpsed her while traveling in Munich. Grace had contacted the German police, and even traveled

there himself to search for her, but nothing came of it. He continues to wonder, and to grieve.



At work, Grace is handed what should have been a routine fatal traffic accident: a cyclist had appeared suddenly from a side street, cutting off an Audi and a small transit van just passing it, and ended up crushed under the wheels of a large lorry coming the other way. Witnesses thought the van had struck the cyclist, but the driver had immediately sped off. When the scene is sorted, however, it's discovered that the Audi driver was under the influence, and she's arrested and charged with causing the

death of the cyclist, a local university student over from America. Understandably, the incident makes the papers.

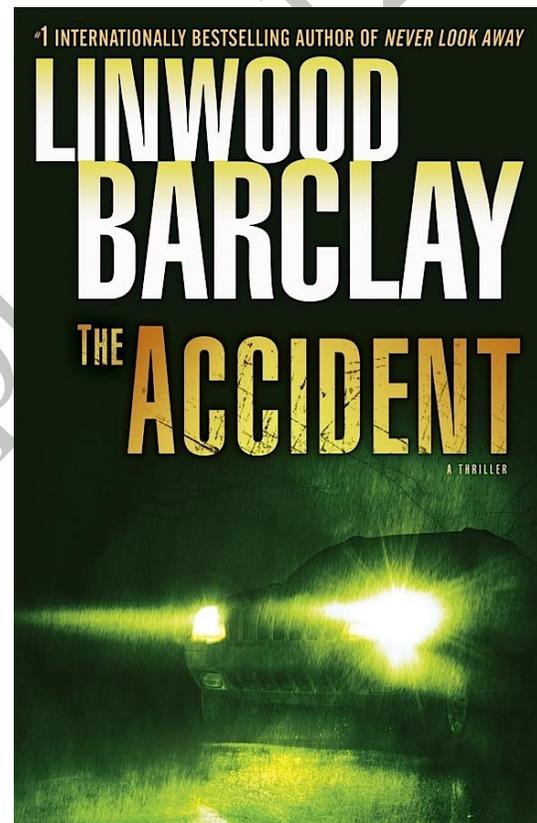
In the normal course of events the police contact the young man's mother, who lives on a posh Long Island estate. Her grief turns to outrage as she learns of the involvement of the various drivers. Understandable in such cases, but one thing makes this case different: she's the wife of an American Mafia boss, and she wants revenge. Each of the drivers might think that the worst is behind them; they'd be wrong.

James is a master storyteller, and *Dead Man's Grip* is very much up to his standard. The story of separate lives converging in one terrible moment, and the consequences of this single event, make for an engrossing race-against-time.

**Linwood Barclay, *The Accident*  
(Doubleday Canada, 2011)**

By the nature of the beast, most thrillers center on a police detective as a key figure. The strength of Canadian author Linwood Barclay's tales lies in their domestic quality: they feature ordinary people caught up in life-defining—and sometimes life-threatening—circumstances. The police may be involved, but only peripherally; at key moments in their lives the victims are compelled to take charge of their lives. Like the ordinary person who casually turns a street corner to encounter someone being savagely attacked and must decide instantly how they will respond, Barclay skillfully exploits his theme: although we may deny it, terror can be just a single step away, and sometimes we are forced to take matters into our own hands.

Glen and Sheila Garber have carved out an ordinary life in the Connecticut burbs. He's a building contractor; his wife clerks in a big-box hardware store. Their daughter Kelly attends the local school. Like many of their friends who are finding that times are tight, the family is just barely getting by. To make matters worse, a house Glen was working on has burned down, and it looks like one of his workers was responsible. The mistake could ruin him financially.



When Sheila is killed in a highway accident for which she is held responsible, Glen cannot accept it. He learns that to help make ends meet, Sheila and a friend had decided to supplement the family income by selling hi-fashion knockoff accessories to their friends. Before they knew it they were in over their heads, caught up in a shady world of organized crime that went far

beyond flogging counterfeit fashion goods, and populated by shadowy, unforgiving figures who will go to any lengths to achieve their aims. Suddenly suburban life has become anything but idyllic.

*The Accident* is a tale of an ordinary family caught up in hard times explores how easy it is for a seemingly innocuous decision to go terribly, tragically wrong. Although violence is an essential part of the story, it is never gratuitous, nor unnecessarily graphic. The strength of Barclay's tale lies in its everydayness: the events that propel his characters into a living nightmare could happen to any one of us.

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