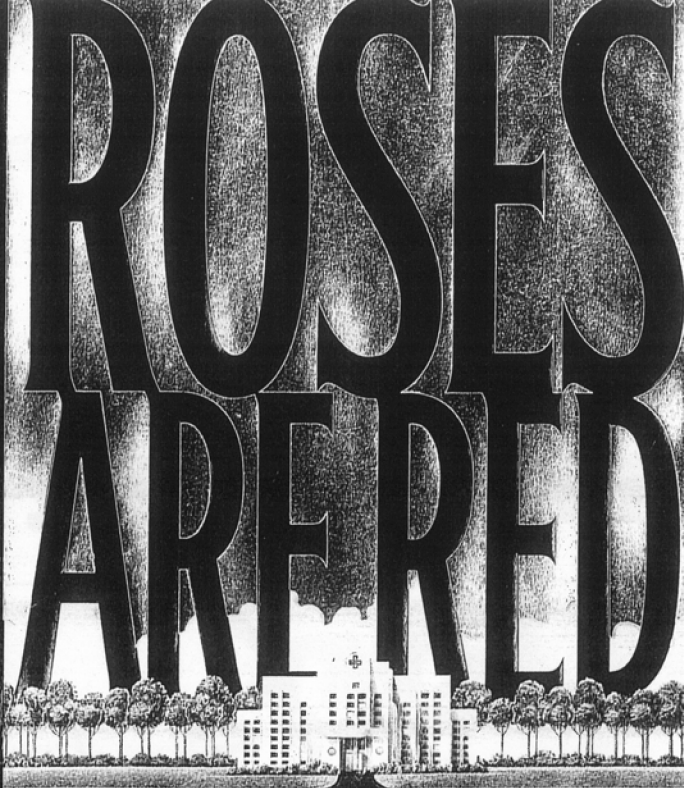


ROSES ARE RED  
JAMES PATTERSON



JAMES PATTERSON

LITTLE, BROWN

## Chapter 16

SOMEBODY was going to be murdered in just a few minutes. It was 8:12. The Falls Church robbery was on the clock and it couldn't be stopped.

Ms. Green had a rapid-fire weapon aimed in the direction of two frightened women tellers; both of them were in their mid to late twenties.

Mr. Blue was already in the manager's office at the First Union branch. He was explaining the rules of the game of "truth or consequences" to James Bartlett and his assistant manager.

"Nobody has any panic buttons on them?" Mr. Blue asked in a fast, high-pitched voice that was *intended* to communi-

## Roses Are Red

cate that he was tense and maybe close to losing it. "That would be a serious mistake, and there can be *no* mistakes."

"We don't have panic buttons," said the bank manager, who seemed smart enough and eager to please. "I would tell you if we did."

"You ever listen to the training tapes put out by the American Society for Industrial Security?" Blue asked.

"N-no, I haven't," the bank manager answered with a nervous stutter. "I'm — I'm — s-sorry."

"Well, their number one recommendation during a robbery is cooperation so that no one gets hurt."

The manager nodded his head rapidly. "I agree with that. I hear you. I'm cooperating, sir."

"You're a pretty smart guy for a bank manager. Everything I told you about your family being held as hostages is the absolute *truth*. I want you to always tell me the truth, too. Or there will be unfortunate *consequences*. That means no trip alarms, no bait money, no dye packs, no hidden cameras. If Sonitrol has a device in here that's recording me now, tell me."

"I know about the job at the Citibank in Silver Spring," the manager said. His wide, square face was beet red. Perspiration dripped from his forehead in large drops. His blue eyes blinked repeatedly.

"Watch your computer screen," Mr. Blue said, and pointed with his gun. "Watch it."

A film sequence came up, and the manager saw his wife putting black tape on the mouths of his three children.

"Oh, God! I know that the manager in Silver Spring was late. Let's get going," he said to the ski-masked man in his office. "My family is everything to me."