

MACMILLAN READERS
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

PHILIP PROWSE

Bristol Murder



MACMILLAN

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Early Morning

It was early one morning in October. Mrs Jones was in the kitchen making breakfast. She had been up since five o'clock. Mrs Jones looked at her watch. It was time to wake Peter.

'Peter, Peter. It's six o'clock. Get up!' she shouted up the stairs. Peter was already awake.

'What?' he asked.

'It's six o'clock,' his mother shouted.

'Oh, OK⁴,' Peter replied. He could smell the breakfast which his mother had prepared for him. He got out of bed slowly and went to the bathroom.

'Peter!' his mother shouted again.

'Yes, Mum. It's OK. I'm up,' Peter shouted back through the door. He washed quickly because it was cold and ran back to his bedroom.

'Peter. Your breakfast's ready,' Mrs Jones continued.

'Yes, Mum. I'm coming,' Peter replied as he was dressing. He ran down the stairs and went through the sitting room to the kitchen.

'Oh, here you are,' his mother said. 'Hurry up or your breakfast will go cold.' Peter sat down and ate his breakfast.

'Do you want some more tea?' Peter's mother asked.

'Yes, please,' Peter replied, with a smile.

'Where are you going today?' Mrs Jones asked, as she was pouring out the tea.

'I don't know,' Peter said. 'What's the time?'

'It's half past six,' answered Mrs Jones, looking at her watch.

'I must go,' Peter said, finishing his cup of tea. 'Thanks for breakfast.'

‘What time will you come back this evening?’ asked Mrs Jones anxiously.

Peter stood up. ‘I don’t know. If it’s a long drive, I won’t be back until tomorrow.’

‘Take care of yourself⁵, Peter,’ his mother said, giving him his coat.

‘Don’t worry, Mum, I will,’ said Peter. Then he quickly put his coat on and went out into the hall.

‘Goodbye,’ his mother shouted.

‘See you, Mum.’ He went out of the front door into the street. He walked along to the end of the street and turned right. As he turned the corner, he saw the bus and started to run. He ran as fast as he could and got on the bus just before it left.

‘Corporation Street, please,’ he said to the driver.

‘Fifty pence, please,’ replied the driver.

Peter paid and sat down. The bus drove quickly through the empty streets and was soon in Corporation Street. Peter got off and walked along the street to Universal Transport Ltd. He went through the gate and into the office.

‘Good morning, Mr James,’ said Peter cheerfully, as he entered the office.

‘Good morning, Peter. How are you?’ said Mr James looking up from his desk. Mr James decided where the lorries went every day and gave the drivers their instructions. He was a short, fat man, aged about forty-five. He was popular with the drivers because he had been a driver himself once. So Mr James understood the drivers’ problems.

‘I’m fine, thanks,’ replied Peter.

‘Good,’ said Mr James, ‘I want you to take a load⁶ of biscuits to Manchester today. You can stay the night there and come back tomorrow.’

‘Right,’ answered Peter. ‘Is the lorry ready?’

‘No, Peter, not yet. Can you help load⁷ it, please?’ asked Mr James.

Peter went outside and walked over to his lorry. He helped put the boxes of biscuits in the lorry and then drove it to the gate. The man at the gate gave Peter the address for the biscuits in Manchester and asked Peter to sign some papers. Peter thanked him, got back into the lorry and drove out of the gate.

It was still only half past seven and Bridgwater was quiet. He drove along Corporation Street and through the centre of the town. The town was empty and all the shops were still closed. Peter drove on and soon passed people leaving their houses and hurrying to work. Peter took the road for Bristol and by eight o'clock he had left Bridgwater and was out in the country. He turned on the radio and listened:

'It will be cold in most of England today, and there will probably be heavy rain. That is the end of the weather forecast⁸. Now it is eight o'clock and time for the news. . . . A middle-aged man was murdered in Bristol late last night. The police would like to talk to a boy of about sixteen who . . .'

Peter turned off the radio. He was always unlucky. Today he had to drive all the way to Manchester and it was going to rain. As he was thinking about the weather the first few drops of rain started to fall.

It was still raining when Peter reached Bristol. It was after nine o'clock now and all the shops were open. There were lots of people and cars and he had to drive slowly. He took the road to the north and was through the town in half an hour. Not bad, he thought. I'll get to Birmingham by lunchtime.

As Peter looked out ahead, he saw a boy standing by the side of the road. It was difficult to see in the rain but the boy looked about sixteen. He was wearing a red jersey, and jeans. He was hitch-hiking⁹ and was holding out his hand to ask for a lift¹⁰.

Peter slowed down and stopped. The boy ran up and opened the door.

'Where are you going?' the boy asked.

'Manchester,' Peter said.

'Can you give me a lift?' the boy asked anxiously.

'Yes, get in.' As he spoke, Peter leant over and helped the boy into the lorry. The boy closed the door. He was very, very wet. Peter drove off.

'Where are you going?' asked Peter.

'I don't know,' said the boy.

'You don't know?' Peter repeated, in a surprised voice.

'No. I've run away from home.' The boy spoke quietly.

'What?' said Peter. The lorry was very noisy and it was difficult to talk.

'I said I've run away from home.' The boy repeated his words loudly but Peter still could not hear.

'What?' Peter asked again.

'I said I've left home. I'm not going to go back,' the boy shouted.

'Why?' asked Peter.

'We had an argument, that's all,' the boy replied slowly.

'What's your name?' inquired Peter.

'John. John Stevens. What's yours?' the boy asked.

'Peter,' replied the lorry driver. 'Well, John, do you feel like a cup of tea?'

'Yes, please.' The boy smiled with pleasure at the idea of a cup of tea.

'There's a café just ahead and we'll stop there,' said Peter, pointing in the direction of the café as he spoke. The lorry stopped outside the café. It was still raining heavily and John and Peter ran inside.