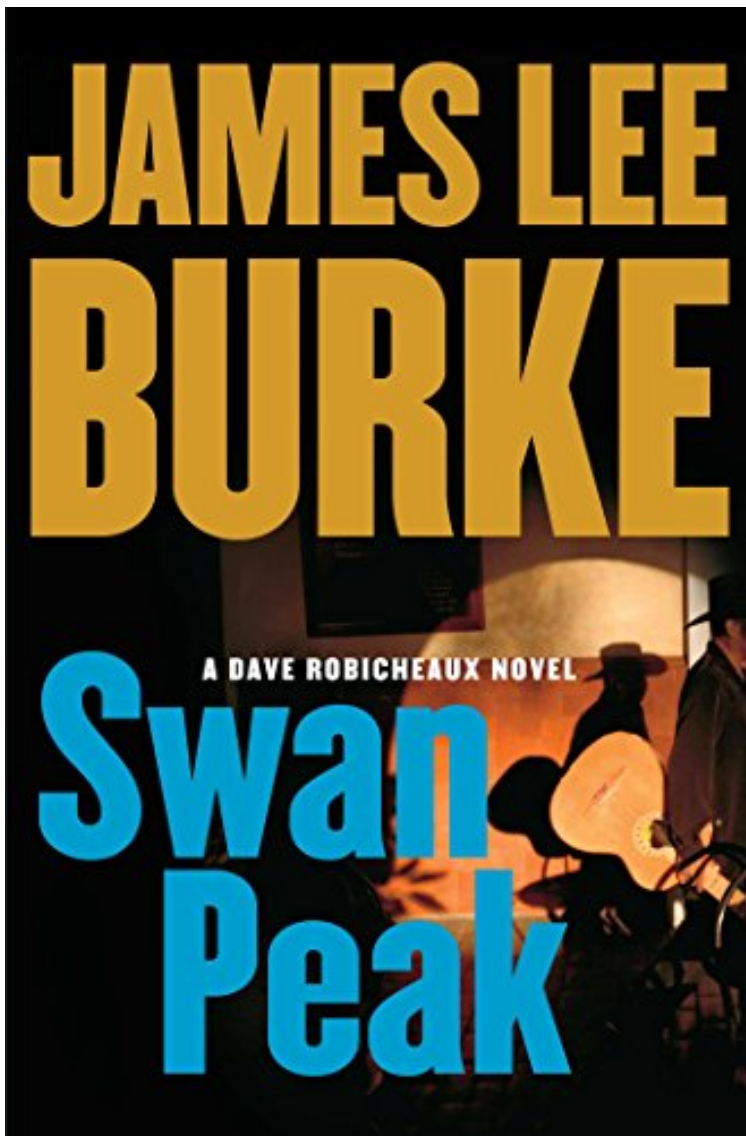


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# Swan Peak: A Dave Robicheaux Novel



*Par James Lee Burke*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Trouble follows Dave Robicheaux. James Lee Burke's new novel, Swan Peak, finds Detective Robicheaux far from his New Iberia roots, attempting to relax in the untouched wilderness of rural Montana. He, his wife, and his buddy Clete Purcell have retreated to stay at an old friend's ranch, hoping to spend their days fishing and enjoying their distance from the harsh, gritty landscape of Louisiana post-Katrina. But the serenity is soon shattered when two college students are found brutally murdered in the hills behind where the Robicheauxs and Purcell are staying. They quickly find themselves involved in a twisted and dangerous mystery involving a wealthy, vicious oil tycoon, his deformed brother and beautiful wife, a sexually deviant minister, an escaped con and former country music star, and a vigilante Texas gunbull out for blood. At the center of the storm is Clete, who cannot shake the feeling that he is being haunted by the

ghosts from his past -- namely Sally Dio, the mob boss he'd sabotaged and killed years before. In this expertly drawn, gripping story, Burke deftly weaves intricate, engaging plotlines and original, compelling characters with his uniquely graceful prose. He transcends genre yet again in the latest thrilling addition to his New York Times bestselling series.

ExtraitSwan Peak CHAPTER 1 CLETE PURCEL HAD heard of people who sleep without dreaming, but either because of the era and neighborhood in which he had grown up, or the later experiences that had come to define his life, he could not think of sleep as anything other than an uncontrolled descent into a basement where the gargoyles turned somersaults like circus midgets. Sometimes he dreamed of his father, the milkman who rose at three-fifteen A.M. and rumbled off to work in a truck that clinked with bottles and trailed a line of melting ice out the back doors. When his father reentered the house off Magazine at midday, he occasionally carried a sack of Popsicles for Clete and his two sisters. On other days, his face was already oily and distorted with early-morning booze, his victimhood and childlike cruelty searching for release on the most vulnerable members of his home. Sometimes in his dreams Clete saw a straw hooch with a mam-san in the doorway suddenly engulfed in an arc of liquid flame sprayed from a Zippo-track. He saw a seventeen-year-old door gunner go apeshit on a wedding party in a free-fire zone, the brass cartridges jacking from an M60 suspended from a bungee cord. He saw a navy corpsman with rubber spiders on his steel pot try to stuff the entrails of a marine back inside his abdomen with his bare hand. He saw himself inside a battalion aid station, his neck beaded with dirt rings, his body dehydrated from blood expander, his flak jacket glued to the wound in his chest. He saw the city of New Orleans sink beneath the waves, just as Atlantis had. Except in the dream, New Orleans and the China Sea and perhaps a place in the Mideast, where he had never been, melded together and created images that were nonsensical. Blood washed backward off a sandy cusp of beach into a turquoise ocean. Soldiers who looked like people Clete had once known struggled silently uphill into machine guns that made no sound. When he woke, he felt that his own life had been spent in the service of enterprises that today contained no learning value for anyone and would be replicated over and over again, regardless of the cost. A psychiatrist once told him he suffered from agitated depression and psychoneurotic anxiety. Clete asked the psychiatrist where he had been for the last fifty years. His dreams clung to his skin like cobweb and followed him into the day. If he drank, his dreams went to a place where dreams go and waited two or three nights before they bloomed again, like specters beckoning from the edge of a dark wood. But on this particular morning Clete was determined to leave his past in the past and live in the sunlight from dawn until nightfall and then sleep the sleep of the dead. It was cold when he unzipped his sleeping bag and crawled out of his polyethylene tent by a creek in western Montana. His restored maroon Caddy convertible with the starched-white top was parked in the trees, speckled with frost. In the distance the sun was just striking the fresh snow that had fallen on the mountain peaks during the night. The spring runoff had ended, and the stream by which he had made his camp was wide and dark and devoid of whitewater and running smoothly over gray boulders that had begun to form shadows on the pebble bed. He could hear the easy sweep of wind in the pine and fir trees, the muted clattering of rocks in the streams current. For a moment he thought he heard a motorized vehicle grinding down the dirt road, but he paid no attention to it. He made a ring of rocks and placed twigs and pinecones inside it and started a fire that flared and twisted in the wind like a yellow handkerchief and blew sparks and smoke across a long riffle undulating down the middle of the streambed. The place where he was cooking his breakfast in an iron skillet set on top of hot rocks was the perfect site for a camp and the perfect place to begin wading upstream through canyon country, false-casting a dry fly over his head, watching it float delicately toward him on the riffle. He had not chosen this place but had found it by accident, turning onto the dirt road after he had found a snow gate locked across the asphalt two-lane. The countryside was grand, the cliffs sheer, the tops of the buttes covered with ponderosa pine, the slopes already blooming with wildflowers. Along the edges of the stream, there were no prints in the soft gravel except those of deer and elk. The air smelled of the woods and wet fern and cold stone and humus that stayed in shade twenty-four hours and the iridescent spray drifting off the boulders in the stream. The air smelled as though it had never been stained by the chemical agencies of the industrial era. It smelled as the earth probably had on the first day of creation, Clete thought. He pulled his hip waders out of the Caddy and put them on by the side of the stream, snapping the rubber straps tight on his belt, looping a net and a canvas creel around his neck. He waded deep into the water, down a ledge, his feet slipping on moss-covered surfaces, until the drop-off sent the water over the edge of his waders. He whipped a dry fly over his head twice, then three times, the line forming a figure eight, whistling with a dull wet sound past his ear. With the fourth cast, he stiffened his wrist and let the fly float gently down on the riffle. That was when he heard the sound of the truck again,

mounting the grade just beyond a cut between two pine-covered hills. But he kept his eyes on the fly floating down the riffle toward him. He saw an elongated shape break from behind a boulder, rising quickly into the light, the dark green dorsal hump roiling the surface. There was a flick of water, like a tiny splash of quicksilver, then the rainbow took the fly and went straight down into the shadows with it. Out of the corner of his eye, Clete saw a bright red pickup with an extended cab and a diesel-powered engine crunch down the slope onto a bed of white rocks. Once stopped, the driver did not cut his engine, nor did he get out of the vehicle. Inside the canyon walls, the engine clattered like a vibrating junkyard. Clete tried to strip line when the rainbow began to run. But his foot slipped on the moss, the tip of his Fenwick bowed to the water, and his two-pound monofilament tippet snapped in half. Suddenly his Fenwick was as light and useless as air in his palm. He looked up on the bank. The truck was parked in shadow, its headlights sparkling, and Clete could not see through the dark reflection that had pooled in the windshield. He waded up through the shallows until he was on solid ground, then he slipped off his fly vest and laid it on a rock. He set down his fly rod and net and creel and removed his porkpie hat and reset it at a slant on his forehead. He looked at his convertible, where his Smith Wesson .38 rested inside the glove box. Clete walked to his fire ring and squatted beside it, ignoring the truck and the hammering of the diesel engine. He lifted his coffeepot off a warm stone and poured his coffee into a tin cup, then added condensed milk to it from a can he had punctured with his Swiss army knife. Then he got to his feet again, wiping his hands on his clothes, his eyes shifting back onto the front windows of the truck. He stared for a long time at the truck, drinking his coffee, not moving, his expression benign, his green eyes clear and unblinking. He wore a charcoal corduroy shirt and faded jeans that were buttoned under his navel. On first glance his massive arms and shoulders and the breadth of his chest gave him a simian appearance, but his top-heavy proportions were redeemed by his height and his erect posture. A pink scar that had the texture and color of a bicycle patch ran through one eyebrow. The scar and his over-the-hill good looks and his little-boy haircut and the physical power that seemed to emanate from his body created a study in contrasts that attracted women to him and gave his adversaries serious pause. Both front doors of the truck opened, and two men stepped out on the rocks. They were smiling, glancing up at the hilltops, as though they were sharing in Cletes appreciation of the morning. Get a little lost? the driver said. Somebody locked the snow gate on the state road, so I turned in here for the night, Clete said. That road is not state-owned. Its private. But you probably didnt know that, the driver said. The accent was slightly adenoidal, perhaps Appalachian or simply Upper South. My map shows it as a state road, Clete said. Would you mind cutting your engine? Im starting to get a headache, here. The drivers physique was nondescript, his face lean, his brown hair dry and uncombed, ruffling in the breeze, his smile stitched in place. A half-circle of tiny puncture scars was looped under his right eye, as though a cookie cutter had been pressed into his skin, recessing the eye and dulling the light inside it. His shirt hung outside his trousers. Have you caught any fish? he asked. Not yet, Clete replied. He looked at the passenger. What are you doing? The passenger was a hard-bodied, unshaved man. His hair was black and shiny, his dark eyes lustrous, his flannel shirt buttoned at the wrists and throat. He wore canvas trousers with big brads on them and a wide leather belt hitched tightly into his hips. The combination of his unwashed look and the fastidious attention he gave his utilitarian clothes gave him a bucolic aura of authority, like that of a man who wears the smell of his sweat and testosterone as a challenge to others. Im writing down your license number, if you dont have an objection, he said. Yeah, I do object, Clete said. Who are you guys? The unshaved man with black hair nodded and continued to write on his notepad. You from Lousana? Im from down south myself. Mississippi. You been to Mississippi, havent you? he said. When Clete didnt reply, the passenger said, New Orleans flat-ass got ripped off the map, didnt it? Yeah, the F-word in Louisiana these days is FEMA, Clete said. You got a lot less Afro-Americans to worry about, though, the passenger said. He rolled the racial designation on his tongue. What is this? Clete said. Youre on posted land, is what this is, the driver said. I didnt see any sign to that effect, Clete said. The passenger went to the truck and lifted a microphone off the dash and began speaking into it. You guys are running my tag? Clete said. You dont remember me? the driver said. No. Itll come to you. Think back about seventeen years or so. Tell you what, Ill pack up my gear and clear out, and well call it even, Clete said. Well see, the driver said. Well see? Clete said. The driver shrugged, still grinning. The passenger finished his call on the radio. His name is Clete Purcel. Hes a PI out of New Orleans, he said. Theres a pair of binoculars on the seat of his convertible. You been spying on us, Mr. Purcel? the driver said. Ive got no idea who you are. Youre not working for the bunny huggers? the driver said. Were done here, bub. We need to look inside your vehicle, Mr. Purcel, the driver said. Are you serious? Clete said. Youre on the Wellstone Ranch, the driver said. We can have you arrested for

trespassing, or you can let us do our job and look in your car. You didnt have situations like this when you worked security at Tahoe? Clete blinked, then pointed his finger. You were a driver for Sally Dio. I was a driver for the car service he used. Too bad he got splattered in that plane accident. Yeah, a great national tragedy. I heard they flew the flag at half-mast for two minutes in Palermo, Clete said. He glanced at the black-haired man, who had just retrieved a tool from the truck and was walking back toward Cletes Caddy with it. Tell your man there if he sticks that Slim Jim in my door, Im going to jam it up his cheeks. Whoa,

Quince, the driver said. Were going to accept Mr. Purcel's word. Hell clean up his camp and be gone He paused and looked thoughtfully at Clete. What, five or ten minutes, Mr. Purcel? Clete cleared an obstruction in his windpipe. He poured his coffee on his fire. Yeah, I can do that, he said. So, see you around, the driver said. I didnt get your name. I didnt give it. But its Lyle Hobbs. That ring any bells for you? Clete kept his expression flat, his eyes empty. My memory isnt what it used to be. The man who had introduced himself as

Lyle Hobbs stepped closer to Clete, his head tilting sideways. You trying to pull on my crank? Clete set his tin coffee cup on the rock next to his Fenwick and slipped his hands into the back pockets of his jeans, as a third-base coach might. Dont say anything, he told himself. You dont hide your thoughts too good, the driver said. You got one of those psychodrama faces. People can read everything thats in it. You ought to be an actor. You were up on a molestation charge. You did a county stint on it, Clete said. The girl was thirteen. She recanted her statement eventually, and you went back to driving for Sally Dee. You got a good memory. It was a bum beef from the jump. I got in the sack with the wrong lady blackjack dealer. Hell hath no fury,

know what I mean? But I didnt drive for Sally Dee. I drove for the service he contracted. Yeah, you bet, Clete replied, his eyes focused on neutral space. Have a good day, Lyle Hobbs said. His head was still tilted sideways, his grin still in place. His impaired eye seemed to have the opaqueness and density of a lead rifle ball. Same to you, Clete said. He began to take down his tent and fold it into a neat square while the two visitors to his camp backed their truck around. The back of his neck was hot, his mouth dry, his blood pounding in his ears and wrists. Walk away, walk away, walk away, a voice in his head said. He heard the

oversize truck tires crunch on the rocks, then the steel bumper scrape across stone. He turned around in time to see one wheel roll over his Fenwick rod and grind the graphite shanks and the lightweight perforated reel and the aluminum guides and the double-tapered floating line into a pack rats nest. You did that deliberately, Clete said, rising to his feet. Didnt see it, Scouts honor, the driver said. I saw them comb Sally Dee and his crew out of the trees. The whole bunch looked like pulled pork somebody had dropped into a fire. Youre a swinging dick, big man. Public campground is five miles south. Catch a fat one.

From Publishers Weekly Detective Dave Robicheaux is pitted against all types, from an oil tycoon's deformed brother to a sexually indiscreet minister. With these colorful characters running rampant, narrator Will Patton never stumbles in his delivery or interpretations, offering realistic, entertaining characters who are sure to engage listeners right from the start. Patton's voice is perfectly suited for Burke's rough and tumble tale, his gritty Southern dialect sets the tone for this brooding murder mystery. A Simon Schuster hardcover ( \$24.95, May 19).

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