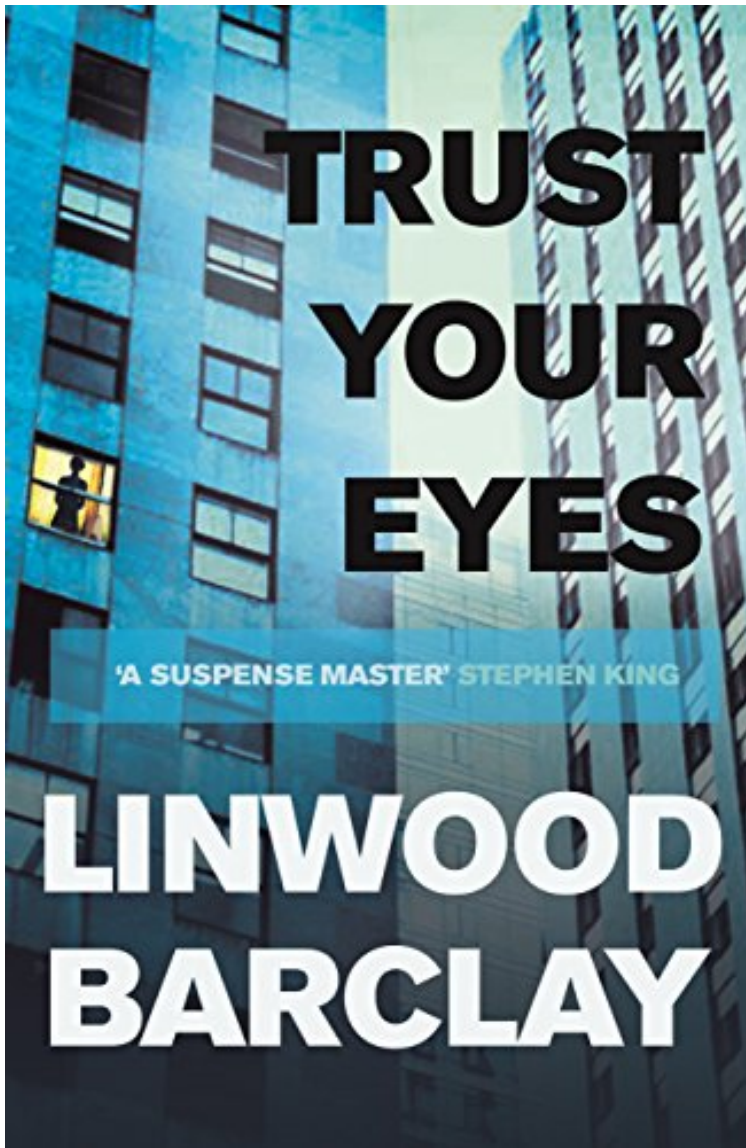


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Trust Your Eyes (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhat would you do if you witnessed a murder - but no one believed you . . .? Another masterful suspense novel from the bestselling author of the Richard Judy summer read winner, NO TIME FOR GOODBYEMap-obsessed Thomas spends his days and nights on a virtual tour of the world through his computer screen, believing he must store the details of every town and city in his head. Then one day, while surfing a street view program, he sees something that shouldn't be there: a woman being murdered behind a window on a New York street. When Thomas tells his brother Ray what he has witnessed, Ray humours him with a half-hearted investigation - until he realises Thomas may have stumbled onto a deadly conspiracy, which puts them both in danger . . .With enough suspense to rival a Hitchcock film, this is a

thriller with edge. Extrait PROLOGUE It was just by chance he turned down Orchard Street and saw the window when he did. It easily could have been a week from now, or a month, even a year. But it turned out that this was going to be the day. Sure, he would have wandered down here eventually. Sooner or later, when he got to a new city, he hit every street. He always started out intending to be methodical about it follow one street from beginning to end, then head over a block and backtrack on a parallel street, like doing the aisles in a grocery store but then he'd get to a cross street and something would catch his eye, and all good intentions would be abandoned. That was how it turned out when he got to Manhattan, even though, of all the cities he'd visited, it was the one that most lent itself to being explored in an orderly fashion, at least those parts of the city north of Fourteenth Street, which was laid out in that perfect grid of streets and avenues. South of that, once you got into the West Village and Greenwich Village and SoHo and Chinatown, well, it was chaos down there, but that didn't bother him. It certainly wasn't any worse than in London or Rome or Paris or even Boston's North End, and he'd loved exploring those cities. He'd turned south onto Orchard from Delancey, but his actual starting point for this stroll had been Spring and Mulberry. He'd gone south to Grand, west to Crosby, north back to Prince, east to Elizabeth, south to Kenmare, then east, continuing along Delancey, then, when he got to Orchard, decided to hang a right. It was a beautiful street. Not in the sense that there were gardens and fountains and lush trees lining the sidewalk. Not beautiful like, say, Vaci Street in Budapest, or the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, or Lombard Street in San Francisco, but it was a street rich in texture and steeped in history. Narrow, one-way, running north. Old brick tenement buildings, few more than five stories, many only three or four, dating back a century and a half. A street that represented so many different times in the city's history. The buildings, with their skeletal fire escapes clinging to the fronts, reflected the Italianate style popular in the mid-to late nineteenth century, with arches above the windows, stone lintels projecting outward, ornate carved leaves in the trim work, but their ground floors housed everything from trendy cafs to designer dress shops. There were older, more conventional businesses, too. A uniform shop, a real estate agent, a hair salon, a gallery, a place that sold luggage. Many of the closed stores were shielded with drawn-down steel doors. He meandered down the center of the street, not particularly worried about traffic. It wasn't a problem right now. He always found you got the sense of a place by walking down the middle of the road. It offered the best vantage point. You could look ahead or from side to side, or whirl around 360 degrees and see where you'd been. It was good to know your surroundings and your options, in case you had to make a fast move. Because the building blocks of a city were his primary concerns its architecture, its layout, its infrastructure he paid little attention to the people he came across in his travels. He didn't strike up conversations. He wasn't interested in saying so much as hello to that redheaded woman standing on the corner, smoking a cigarette. He didn't care what kind of fashion statement she was trying to make with her leather jacket, short skirt, and what looked like deliberately laddered black tights. He wasn't going to ask the athletic-looking woman in the black baseball cap who was darting across the street in front of him how she thought the Yankees were going to do this year. He never watched baseball, and cared nothing about it. And he was not about to ask why a dozen people with guidebooks sticking out of their pockets were listening to one woman in the center of the group, although he guessed she was a tour guide of some sort. When he got to Broome Street he spotted an inviting-looking restaurant on the southeast corner with small white tables and yellow plastic chairs set up on the sidewalk. But there was no one sitting outside. The sign in the window read: "Come in and get warm." He went up close, peering through the glass at the people drinking coffee, working on laptops, reading newspapers. Reflected in the restaurant's window was that car he'd been seeing throughout his travels. Nondescript sedan. Maybe a Civic. With the apparatus on the roof. He'd seen the car before. Many times. If he didn't know better, he'd think it was following him. He put it out of his mind and looked through the glass, into the restaurant. He wished it were possible for him to go inside and have a latte or a cappuccino. He could almost smell the coffee. But he had to keep going. So much of the world to see and so little time. Tomorrow he had plans to be in Montreal, and, depending how much ground he covered there, maybe Madrid the day after. But he would remember this place. The sign in the window, the tables and chairs outside. The other businesses on Orchard. The narrow alleyways between the buildings. Plus everything that he had seen on Spring and Mulberry and Grand and Crosby and Prince and Elizabeth and Kenmare and Delancey. He would remember it all. He was about a third of the way down the block from the Broome cross street when he made that upward glance. That was really where the element of chance entered into it. It wasn't at all remarkable that he ended up on Orchard. It was the fact that he looked above the storefronts. He didn't always do that. He scoped out the businesses and read the signs in their windows, studied the people in

the coffee shops, made a mental note of the numbers above the doors, but he didn't always cast his eyes above the first or second floors. Sometimes he forgot, and sometimes he was short of time. He might easily have gone down this street and never glanced upon that particular window of that particular tenement building. Then again, he thought, chance might have had nothing to do with it. Maybe he was meant to see this window. Maybe, in some strange way, it was a test. To determine whether he was ready, even though he believed he was. But those who would make use of his talents they might need some convincing before taking him on. The window was on the third floor, above a place that sold cigarettes and newspapers there was that car again, reflected in the window and a second shop specializing in women's scarves. It was divided into two panes. An air-conditioning unit stuck out from the sill, taking up half of the lower pane. Something white, above the air conditioner, had caught his eye. At first, it looked like one of those white Styrofoam heads department stores and hair salons use to display wigs. He thought, Isn't that funny, to put one of those in a window. A bald, featureless white head keeping watch over Orchard Street. He supposed that in New York you could find just about anything in someone's window. If it had been his, he would have at least put a pair of sunglasses on it, to give the head some personality. A hint of whimsy. Although, he had to admit, people did not tend to think of him as whimsical. But the more he looked at it, the less sure he was that it was a white foam head. The surface appeared more shimmery, slippery even. Perhaps plastic, like the bags the grocery stores used, or a dry cleaning bag, but not one of the clear ones. He attempted to get a better look, zero in. The thing was, this white, almost circular object in the window still had the shape of a head. The plastic material strained against a protuberance that could only be a nose. It hugged tight across what appeared to be a brow near the top, a chin at the bottom. There was even a trace of mouth, the lips open as though gasping for air. Or screaming. It was, he thought, as though a white stocking had been pulled down over someone's head. But the material's sheen still made him think it was plastic. That wasn't a very smart thing for someone to do. To put a plastic bag over their head. You could suffocate yourself doing something stupid like that. A person would have to be pulling on the plastic bag, twisting it from behind, to make it conform so tightly to the contours of their face. But he didn't see this person's arms or hands doing anything like that. Which made him wonder if someone else was doing it. Oh. Oh, no. Was that what he was witnessing? Someone putting a bag over another person's head? Cutting off their air supply? Smothering them? Could this account for the mouth that seemed to be struggling for air? Who was this happening to? A man? A woman? And who was doing it to them? Suddenly he was thinking about the boy in the window. A different window. Many years ago. But the person in this window, right now, didn't look like a boy, or a girl. This was an adult. An adult whose life was coming to an end. That certainly was how it looked to him. He felt his heart begin to beat more quickly. He'd seen things before on his travels. Things that weren't right. But they were minor compared to this. Never a murder. That's what he was sure this was. He didn't shout out. He didn't reach into his jacket for a cell phone to call 911. He didn't spring into the nearest shop and tell someone to call the police. He didn't charge into the building and race up two flights of stairs in a bid to stop what was happening behind this third-floor window. All he did was reach out, tentatively, as though it were possible to touch the smothered face of this person on the third floor, to feel what was wrapped around his or her head, make some sort of assessment as to Knock knock. Then, maybe then, he'd have a better idea what was actually happening to this person in Knock knock. He'd been so transfixed by what was happening at the window that he did not, at first, realize someone was trying to get his attention. Someone was at the door. He took his hand off the mouse, spun around in his padded computer chair, and said, "Yes?" The door opened an inch. From the hallway, someone said, "Get your ass down for dinner, Thomas." "What are we having?" he asked. "Burgers. From the barbecue." The man sitting in the computer chair said flatly, "Okay." He spun around and resumed looking at the frozen image of the window on his oversized computer monitor. The blurry, white, wrapped head suspended there. A ghostly visage. Had anyone seen this at the time? Had anyone looked up? No one had seen the boy when he was in the window. No one had looked up. No one had helped him. The man left the image on his screen so he could study it more closely when he came back up after dinner. Then he'd make a decision about what to do. TWO WEEKS EARLIER ONE "COME on in, Ray." Harry Peyton shook my hand and led me into his law office, pointing me toward the red leather chair opposite his desk. About the same age as my father, he looked years younger than Dad had. He was six feet, trim, with a head smooth as a melon. Baldness aged some guys, but not Harry. He was a long-distance runner, and his expensive suit fit him like a second skin. His desk was a testament to orderliness. A computer monitor, keyboard, one of the latest smartphones. And one legal file folder. The rest of the desk was as clean as a canvas before the first brushstroke. "Again, I'm so sorry," Harry said. "There are a hundred

things one could say about your dad, but Reverend Clayton summed it up nicely. Adam Kilbride was a good man."I forced a smile. "Yeah, the minister did a pretty good job, considering he'd never met Dad. He wasn't much of a churchgoer. I guess we were lucky to find anyone to preside. Thanks for coming to the service. It almost got us up to a dozen."Eleven people showed up for the funeral, and that was counting the minister and myself. There was Harry, and three of Dad's coworkers from the company he'd worked for, including his onetime boss, Len Prentice, and Len's wife, Marie. Also there were a friend of Dad's who ran a hardware store in Promise Falls before the Home Depot opened up outside of town and put him out of business, Dad's younger brother Ted and his wife, Roberta, from Cleveland, and a woman named Hannah whose last name I never got who lived just down the road from Dad. And there was a woman Thomas and I knew from high school, Julie McGill, who worked for the local paper, the Promise Falls Standard, and had written the story about Dad's accident. She hadn't come to report on the funeralhow Dad died had made him a small news item, but he wasn't citizen of the year or head of the Rotary or anything. His service to the community was not newsworthy. Julie had come to pay her respects, simple as that.The funeral home had a lot of egg salad sandwiches left over. They insisted I take some back to the house for my brother. I'd explained his absence by saying he wasn't feeling well, but no one, at least no one who knew my brother, believed it. I was tempted to pitch the sandwiches out the car window on the way home. Let the birds enjoy them, instead of my brother. But I didn't. I took them home, and they all got eaten."I'd hoped your brother might have come," Harry said. "It's been some time since I've seen him." At first I thought he meant to this meeting, which puzzled me, since my brother was not an executor. Then I realized Harry meant the funeral."Yeah, well, I gave it my best shot," I said. "He wasn't really sick." "I figured." "I tried to talk him into it, but it was pointless." Peyton shook his head sympathetically. "Your father, he tried to do his best by him. Just like when your motherRose, God bless herwas still with us. How long's it been?" "She passed away in 2005." "After that, it must have been even more difficult for him." "He was still with PL then," I said. Prentice and Long, the printers. "I think, maybe, after he took that early retirement not long after that, it got tougher. Being there, all the time. It got to him, but he wasn't the kind of man to run away from something." I bit my lip. "Mom, she found ways not to let it bother her, she had a way of accepting things, but it was tougher for Dad." "Adam was a young man, really," Harry said. "Sixty-two, for Christ's sake. I was stunned when I heard." "Yeah, well, me, too," I said. "I don't know how many times Mom told him, over the years, that cutting grass on that steep hill, on the lawn tractor, was dangerous. But he always insisted he knew what he was doing. Thing is, that part of the property, it's way back of the house you can't see it from the road or any of the neighbors' places. The ground slopes almost forty-five degrees down to the creek. Dad would mow along there sideways, leaning his body into the hill so the tractor wouldn't tip over." "How long do they think your father was out there before they found him, Ray?" "Dad probably went out to cut the grass after lunch, and wasn't discovered until nearly six. When the tractor flipped over on top of him, the top edge of the steering wheel landed across his middle" I pointed to my own stomach"you know, his abdomen, and it crushed his insides." "Jesus," Harry said. He touched his own stomach, imagining the pain my father must have felt for God knew how long. I didn't have much to add to that. "He was a year younger than me," Harry said, wincing. "We'd get together for a drink now and then. Back when Rose was alive, we'd play a round of golf every once in a while. But he didn't feel he could leave your brother on his own for the time it took to play eighteen holes." "Dad wasn't very good at it, anyway," I said. Harry smiled ruefully. "I'm not going to lie. Not a bad putter, but he couldn't drive worth a shit." I laughed. "Yeah." "But once Rose passed, your dad didn't even have time to hit a bucket of balls at the driving range." "He spoke highly of you," I said. "You were always a friend first, and his lawyer second." They'd known each other at least twenty-five years, back to when Harry was going through a divorce and, after giving his house to his ex-wife, lived for a time above a shoe store here in downtown Promise Falls, in upstate New York. Harry used to joke that he had a lot of nerve, offering his services as a divorce attorney, after getting taken to the cleaners during his own. Harry's phone emitted a single chime, indicating an e-mail had landed, but he didn't even glance at it. "Last time I talked to Dad," I said, nodding at the phone, "he was thinking about getting one of those. He had a phone that would take pictures, but it was an old one, and it didn't take very good ones. And he wanted a phone that would be easy for sending e-mails." "All this new high-tech stuff never scared Adam," Harry said, then clapped his hands together, signaling it was time to move on to why I was here. "You were saying, at the funeral, that you've still got the studio, in Burlington?" "I lived across the state line, in Vermont." "Yeah," I said. "Work's good?" "Not bad. The industry's changing." "I saw one of your drawingsis that what you call them?" "Sure," I said. "Illustrations. Caricatures." "Saw one in the New York Times Book a few weeks back.

I can always tell your style. The people all have really big noggins and the tiny bodies, looks like their heads would make 'em fall over. And they all have these rounded edges. I love how you shade their skin tones and everything. How do you do that?" "Airbrush," I said. "You do a lot of work for the Times?" "Not as much as I used to. It's a lot easier to run a file pic than hire someone to do an illustration from scratch. Papers and magazines are cutting back. I'm doing more for Web sites these days." "You design those things? Web sites?" "No. I do artwork for them and hand it off to the Web site builders." "I would have thought, doing stuff for magazines and newspapers in New York and Washington, you'd have to live there, but I guess these days, it doesn't much matter." "Anything you can't scan and e-mail, you can FedEx," I said. When I said nothing else, Harry opened the file on his desk and studied the papers inside. "Ray, I take it you've seen the will your father drew up," he said. "Yes." "He hadn't updated it in a long time. Made a couple of changes after your mother died. The thing is, I ran into him one day. He was sitting there in a booth at Kelly's having a coffee and he offered to buy me one. He was by himself, at a table by the window, staring out at the street, looking at the Standard but not really reading it. I'd see him in there every once in a while, like he just needed time alone, out of the house. Anyway, he waved me over and said he was thinking of amending it, his will, that is, that he might need to make some special provisions, but he never got around to it." "I didn't know that," I said, "but I guess I'm not surprised. What with how things have been with my brother, I could see him wanting to give more to one than the other." "I think, to be honest, if Adam had come in here wanting to make some changes, I might have tried talking him out of anything that would have favored one child over the other. I'd have told him, the best thing to do is treat all your kids the same. Otherwise, that's going to lead to resentment after you're gone. Of course, it still would've been his decision. But while this existing will is fairly straightforward, there are things you're going to have to think about." "I was picturing my father, sitting in the diner, the rest of the booth unoccupied. He'd had plenty of time to himself in the house since Mom died, even if, technically speaking, he wasn't alone. He didn't have to leave the house for solitude. But I could understand his need to escape. Sometimes you needed to know that you were absolutely alone. You needed a change of scenery. It made me sad, thinking about it." "So I guess the way it is now, then," I said, "is fifty-fifty. Once the estate is liquidated, half goes to me and half goes to my brother." "Yes. Property, and investments." "About a hundred thousand there," I said. "What he and Mom had managed to scrape together for retirement. They'd saved for years. They never spent anything on themselves. He could have made a hundred grand last him till the day he died." I caught myself. "If he'd lived another twenty or thirty years, I mean. And I gather there's a life insurance policy that's fairly small." Harry Peyton nodded and leaned back in his chair, lacing his fingers at the back of his head. He sucked in some air between his teeth. "You'll have to decide what to do about the house. You've every right to put it up for sale, split the proceeds with your brother. There's no mortgage on the place, and I'm guessing you could get three, four hundred thousand for it." "About that," I said. "There's nearly sixteen acres." "Which, if you got that, would leave each of you with about a quarter million, give or take. That's not a bad chunk of change, all things considered. How old are you, Ray?" "Thirty-seven." "And your brother, he's two years younger, that right?" "Yes." Peyton nodded slowly. "Invested wisely, it might be enough to last him quite a few years, but he's still a young man. And he's got a while before he hits Social Security. He's not really employable, from what your dad told me." I hesitated. "That's fair." "For you, well, the money's a different thing. You could invest it, buy a bigger house for the time when you have I know you're not married now, Ray, but someday, you meet someone, you have kids" "I know," I said. I'd come close to getting married, a couple of times, in my twenties, but it never happened. "I don't see any kids on the horizon." "You never know." He waved his hand again. "None of my business, anyway, except in an unofficial capacity, because I think your dad hoped I'd look out for you boys, offer you guidance where I could." He laughed. "You're hardly boys anymore, of course. It's been a long time since that was the case." "Appreciate it, Harry." "The point I'm making, Ray, is for you it's a minor windfall, but you'd have made out fine without it. You make a good living, and if your work takes a downturn, you'll find something else, land on your feet. But for your brother, this inheritance is all he'll ever have. He might need the money from the house to keep him afloat, provided he can find a place, someplace suitable, where his rent's subsidized or something." "I've been thinking about that," I said. "What I'm wondering is, will you be able to get him out of the house? I mean, you know, not just for the afternoon, but permanently?" I looked about the room, as though I might find the answer. "I don't know. It's not like he's what's the word agoraphobic? Dad managed to get him out, once in a while. Mostly for his doctor's appointments." I found it hard to say the word "psychiatrist," but Harry knew. "It's not getting him outside that's the problem. It's prying him away from the keyboard. Whenever he and Dad went out, they both

returned home pretty frazzled. Moving him out, settling him in someplace else, it's not something I look forward to." Harry said, "Well, I'll get the ball rolling here. The great thing for you, being an executor, is there really isn't all that much to do, except to come in here the odd time and sign some papers. There'll be the occasional item I'll need your take on, and I'll have Alice give you a dingle. You might want to get the property appraised, tell you what it could go for." He ruffled through his papers. "I got all your numbers and e-mail address here I think." "Yeah," I said. "And you probably knew your dad had sent me a copy of the policy for his file that there was an accidental death provision in his life insurance." "I didn't know that." "Another fifty thousand. A little something else to go into the pot." Harry paused while I digested this news. "So, you're going to be hanging around for a while, then, before you head back to Burlington?" "Until I sort things out." "We were done, at least for now. As Harry led me out of the office, he put his hand on my arm. "Ray," he said tentatively, "do you think if your brother had noticed how long it had been since your dad had been in the house, if he'd gone out looking for him a little sooner, it would have made any difference?" I'd asked myself the same question. Dad, pinned to the ground just over the hill, probably several hours before my brother found him. There had to have been quite a racket when it happened. The tractor flipping over, the rotating blades roaring. Did Dad scream? And if he had, would he have been heard over the noise of the mower? Would any of the sounds have carried up over the hill to the house? My brother probably never heard a thing. "I tell myself it wouldn't have made any difference," I said. "There's no point thinking otherwise." Harry nodded understandingly. "I guess that's the best way to look at it. What's done is done. No turning back the clock." I wondered if Harry was going to offer up another cliché, but instead he said, "He's really off in his own little world, isn't he?" "You don't know the half of it," I said.