

Taking things at face value

Sometimes appearances deceive

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Everyone functions in life based on recognizing what is familiar, slotting new experiences into categories based on what's happened in the past. When we sit down we assume the chair will support us; when we eat a meal, we assume it won't poison us, and hopefully will taste good; out for a drive, we routinely step on the brake pedal, confident that our car will stop. Such actions are only reasonable and, indeed, necessary. We can't question everything around us or we would never get through the day. Nor should we; the vast majority of the time our assumption that something familiar will behave in a predictable way is borne out by experience.

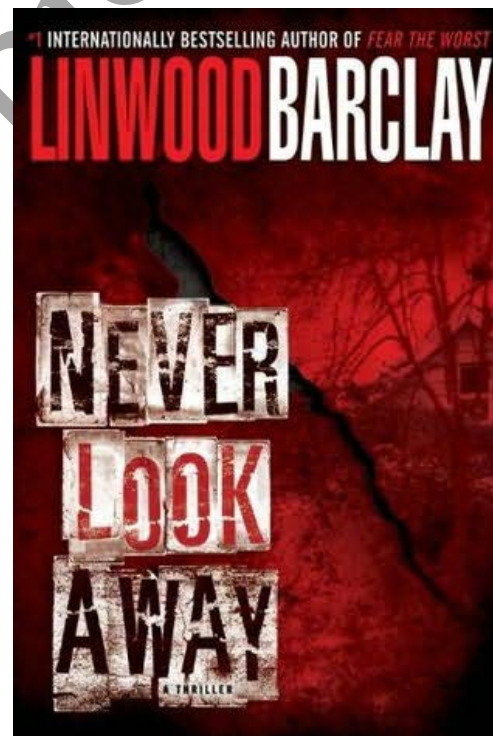
But what if someone you knew — someone in fact very close to you — wasn't who or what you thought they were? What if your most important expectations were turned upside down, and your comfortable, predictable world came crashing down around you?

It's a chilling thought, and one that makes for a riveting new thriller in the hands of Canadian crime writer Linwood Barclay.

Linwood Barclay

It's no secret that Canada has more than its share of world-class crime

writers, not that this is a new phenomenon: Torontonians Peter Robinson and Maureen Jennings have been on the scene for more than twenty years, entertaining readers around the world. And more recently Louise Penny and Giles Blunt have earned global followings with their original, award-winning crime fiction. Now former journalist Linwood Barclay has clearly joined



their ranks: his debut thriller *No Time for Goodbye* became 2008's bestselling crime novel in the UK on sales of over 600,000 copies, and has been translated into nearly three

dozen languages; its sequel, *Too Close to Home* garnered the Crime Writers of Canada's Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel of 2009. Nor is Barclay merely a one-trick pony: with his quirky sense of humour (he has published several darkly funny crime novels and was shortlisted for the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour) Barclay is much in demand as an after-dinner speaker, and later this month will be the Master of Ceremonies at Toronto's *Bloody Words*, Canada's largest annual crime writing festival for authors and fans.

But this time the redoubtable author has outdone himself, with a compelling, original standalone tale that will grip you from the opening pages and hold you in its grasp until the very end.

Never Look Away
(Doubleday, 2010)

Family time. Journalist David Harwood has planned an outing at a major amusement park with his troubled wife Jan and their four-year-old son Ethan. It is a day that will change their lives, utterly and forever.

By the time they arrive at the sprawling complex Ethan is nearly asleep. They load their son into a stroller and enter the park, and David goes ahead in search of some ice cream cones for the family. On his way back he spots his panic-stricken wife, bordering on the hysterical. She says she only turned away for a moment and the stroller, with their son in it, disappeared. A frantic search by the couple proves fruitless, and they split up, Jan heading for the

main gate while David continues to search the grounds.

Through the crowd David spies a bearded man running away. Shifting his view he spots an unattended stroller in the distance. Making his way to it his fear is washed away, replaced by a sense of relief that only a parent can know: Ethan is in the stroller, unharmed and still asleep. It seems the crisis is over: all that remains is to find Jan and give her the good news.

But David is wrong. When he returns to the gate Jan is not there. He heads for their car, but she is nowhere to be found. He tries her cell phone, but that too is fruitless. David notifies Security, and the police quickly respond, throwing up a perimeter around the park and searching all vehicles as well as the grounds. But David's problems are only beginning: a search of the amusement complex fails to turn up his wife, and most baffling of all, a check of surveillance tapes shows no record that she entered the park at all. The police begin to focus their attention on David, certain that he is keeping something from them (which he is). Just when he thought things were impossibly bad, they're about to get a whole lot worse.

***A shocking plot,
loaded with twists and turns***

In April of 2009 I said that *Too Close to Home* was Barclay's best work to date. This book easily surpasses it; going from strength to strength Barclay combines a shocking plot, loaded with twists and turns, sub-plots and red herrings. There is a layer of authenticity to his

tale, informed by Barclay's own experience as a journalist. Managing to maintain a high level of suspense while avoiding gratuitous violence, *Never Look Away* is a strongly written, fast-paced thriller that will appeal to readers looking for a cracking plot but without needless gore. A fine addition to the genre, it must already be considered as a strong contender for next year's Best Novel awards.

Barclay's next novel, *Only Death is Real*, is slated to come out in 2011, and I'm already looking forward to reading it.

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