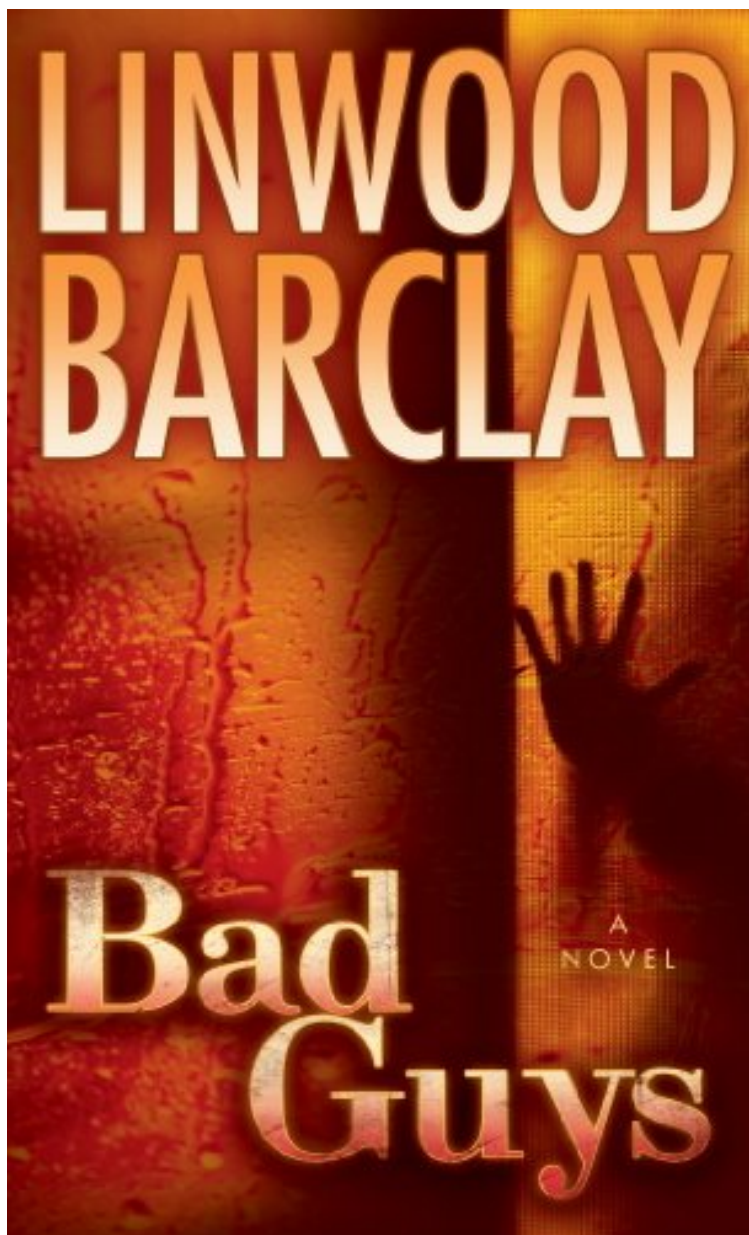


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Bad Guys



Par Linwood Barclay
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFans of the crime caper will rejoice that Linwood Barclay is back with the hilarious follow-up to his riotously funny and irreverent* debut, in which paranoid pop Zack Walker plotted to transplant his city-savvy wife and two teenage kids to the tranquillity of the burbswhere planned communities prevail and fathers rest easy. Well, not quiteand now the Walkers have moved home only to find themselves living in the precarious crosshairs of urban sprawl once again, and Zack cant help but be worriedreally worriedthat just around the corner lurks the presence of some really bad guys.Zack is back,

and much to his family's relief, the work-at-home science-fiction writer has left the house to take a job as a features writer for the city paper. But now that Zack's incessant plotting can no longer be hatched from the comforts of his own home, he must be ever more vigilant to outwit the evil at large, whether in the suburbs, the city, or his own imagination. Zack is ready or so he thinks. While researching his first feature article, Zack stumbles upon a real-life crime scene, but what seems like an ordinary hit-and-run may actually be a homicide linked to a gang that's been burglarizing Crandall's high-end shops. Suddenly Zack finds himself at the center of a violent crime wave and destined for a confrontation with Barbie Bullock, an unsettling figure infamous in the crime syndicate for his ruthless business tactics and peculiar proclivity for collecting dolls. And all is not quiet on the home front either. Zack's protective instincts launch into overdrive when he discovers that his daughter's rejected suitor has been tracing her every step and may harbor a much more ominous motivation than winning a Saturday night date. Nor does his son's strange behavior and recent friendship with a creepy computer recluse inspire joy in a father's heart. As worlds begin to collide and boundaries between family and foe blur, Zack goes on the attack, and heaven help the bad guys when this resourceful father comes to make good on a deal gone bad. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt Chapter One "So, what are you asking me?" Harley said. "Are you asking me for drugs? If you want drugs, there are drugs. There's alprazolam that's your Xanax generic or lorazepam; you've got your diazepam and Diazepam. It's not a cooking spray. It's Valium. There's a huge list of anti-anxiety prescriptions out there, some better than others, some downright dangerous. We don't use phenobarbitals anymore, too addictive, sometimes fatal. There's various herbal remedies, if you're into that sort of thing. Or, I don't know whether you've considered something like this before, but you could just lighten the fuck up. Harley's not your average doctor. He's more of a friend, with a medical degree, and a successful practice, and an examining room, which I happened to be sitting in at this moment, somewhat under duress. Harley and I were buddies back in high school, then lost touch a bit while I went to college for an English degree and he went off to medical school. Hey, I would say to him when we occasionally ran into one another, just what kind of job do you expect to get with a medical degree? Years later, he became my doctor. This appointment hadn't been my idea. It had been my wife Sarah's. And idea is probably the wrong word. Ultimatum would probably be a better one. Go see Harley, she said, or I'm going to call a divorce lawyer. Or smother you in your sleep. The threat about the divorce lawyer didn't worry me that much. Sarah has a low opinion of the legal profession, and would probably choose sticking with me over engaging the services of one of its members. But the smothering-me-in-my-sleep thing, that seemed within her range of capabilities. The thing is, Harley continued, leaning up against the paper-covered examining bed, there's a lot of shit to deal with in life, and sometimes that's just what you have to do. Deal with it. You're not the only one with a teenage daughter, you know. Mine's twenty-two now, seems to finally have her head on straight, but two years ago she was too busy boffing some out-there art student to study for her midterms. The guy did a show of sculptures made from raw meat. You had to go early. I can't seem to help it, I said. I worry. I worry all the time. It's the way I'm hardwired. Sometimes I've let it get the better of me. I know, Harley said. I watch the news. And I've been trying to do better, honest to God, but this thing with Angie . . . How old is she now? Eighteen. Harley's eyes rolled, remembering. And what did you do, exactly? She'd promised to be home by one in the morning. She was going out with some guy from where she worked for the summer, at the pool store. She sold chlorine and algacide and tested water samples, and there was this guy who worked there, young kid, who went around the neighborhood maintaining people's pools for them. Yeah. So she started going out with Pool Boy. This is what you called him. Pool Boy. Not to his face, or to Angie. It was just a name I had for him, is all. Anyway, she was out with him one night, and I was already awake around midnight, and sometimes if I'm up that late, I'll stay up to make sure she gets home okay. I'll read. But if I read in bed, it keeps Sarah up, with the light on, so I went down to the living room, stretched out on the front couch right by the front door, so I'd be right there when Angie got home. Even if I nodded off, I'd hear her when she got in. Go on. Well, I guess I did doze off, and when I woke up, it was two-thirty in the morning, which meant Angie was way past curfew, way past when she said she'd be home. So I got up, went into the kitchen and called her cell, but couldn't get an answer. So, knowing you, you did what you do best, Harley said. You panicked. I did not panic, I said. I went out looking for her. I knew where Pool Boy lived—he lives with his parents—and what kind of car he drove, so I drove over there, and the whole house is dark, except for one light in the basement. Not a good sign, Harley said, nodding slightly. Yeah, well, I got out of my car, looked around his, then went up to the house. You knocked on the door at, what, nearly three in the morning? No, I kind of didn't want to do that unless I knew for sure Angie was there, since I was probably going to be waking up Pool Boy's mom and

dad, so I thought I'd just have a look in the basement window. I had to get down on my knees—they're these shallow windows, only come up about a foot from ground level. Harley sighed, closed his eyes. There was a bit of a gap in the curtains, and I could see it was your basic rec room, wood paneling on the walls, old couch. And who was on the couch, I'm afraid to ask, Harley said. No one, I said. Look, you need to understand, I don't want to violate Angie's privacy, I know what kids are up to today, but it's a safety thing, okay? I just needed to know that she was okay. So you didn't see her in the window, Harley said. Was Pool Boy there? Not inside, I said. But when I got up from looking in the window, I noticed that he was standing next to me. Awkward, said Harley. And his dad was next to him. I guess the dad heard the car, his son was still up, they came out to investigate. Was this before or after they called the cops? After. But by the time they arrived, we'd sorted it out. I mean, they realized who I was. Pool Boy said he'd dropped off Angie around twelve-thirty, and asked if I'd checked her bedroom before I'd come to his place. Which you hadn't. I was sure I'd hear her when she came in. But she says she tiptoed, didn't want to wake me. How long ago was this? About a month. Before school started up again. Angie's still hardly speaking to me. And the thing is, now I think she's got some sort of stalker. Harley dropped into the other chair in the small examining room. He was looking pretty exhausted. I seem to have that effect on people at times. A stalker. Not the Pool Boy. I think they've broken up. There's a surprise, Harley said. Is this part of the new medicine? I asked. Crack wise while your patients open up to you? Of course not. Go ahead. I shall remain nonjudgmental. She calls him a stalker, but you know how kids talk. Anyone who's interested in them they don't like is categorized a stalker. But he calls her a lot, shows up unexpectedly wherever she is. I'm just worried this guy may be some kind of a nutcase. But I'm kind of in a bad spot now, what with the Pool Boy incident being so fresh in everyone's mind, that anything I say or do looks like some kind of hysterical overreaction. Just because a guy calls her a few times and shows up where your daughter hangs out doesn't make him a serial killer. I know that. But I get, jeez, I get this knot in my chest, worrying about my family. It's not like we haven't had some problems in the past. That was then. That was an isolated incident. Harley leaned forward a bit in his chair, like he wanted our conversation to be more intimate. Zack, he said slowly, I don't want to put you on anything unless you feel it's absolutely necessary. It's better to work out your problems without medications. I totally agree, I said. I'm not asking for a prescription. It's not like I'm a hypochondriac or something, although, if you did diagnose something, I'd have to conclude it was fatal. Maybe you need to focus your attention on work, get your mind off what's happening at home. What you're going through isn't any different than what every other parent goes through. We all worry about our kids, but we have to let them live their own lives, you know. Sure. So, when you're writing, doing your work, doesn't that help get your mind off other things? Isn't that a good way to reduce your anxiety level? I nodded. For the most part. So, what are you working on now? Another book? Well, I'm back with a paper now, *The Metropolitan*, doing features. You can't exactly make a living writing books. I liked that one you did, about the guy goes back in time to kill the inventor of those hot-air hand dryers in mens rooms before he's born. That wasn't a bestseller? No, I said. Harley looked surprised. I continued, I'm doing a feature right now on this private eye, and the last few nights, I've been with him on this, like, well, a stakeout I guess you'd call it, hoping to catch some gang that's been smashing into high-end mens shops, making off with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stuff. Sounds interesting, Harley said. But I trust it's not the sort of thing where you're exposing yourself to any real risk. You've had enough of that. I smiled tiredly. Don't worry. From now on, I just write about stuff, I don't get personally involved. That's good, he said. And what about the pharmaceutical option? You want a scrip for anything? I shook my head. Naw, unless there's anything else you can recommend. Harley got up, opened one of the stainless steel cabinets that held cotton balls and gauze and tongue depressors and bandages, rooted around in there and came out with a bottle of what appeared to be very expensive Scotch. He set it on the table next to him, found two small paper cups, and poured a couple of fingers worth into each. I find this works well, he said. *Revue de presse* "Humor, realistic characters, a jaunty first-person narration, and fast pacing make for an enjoyable read." Booklist