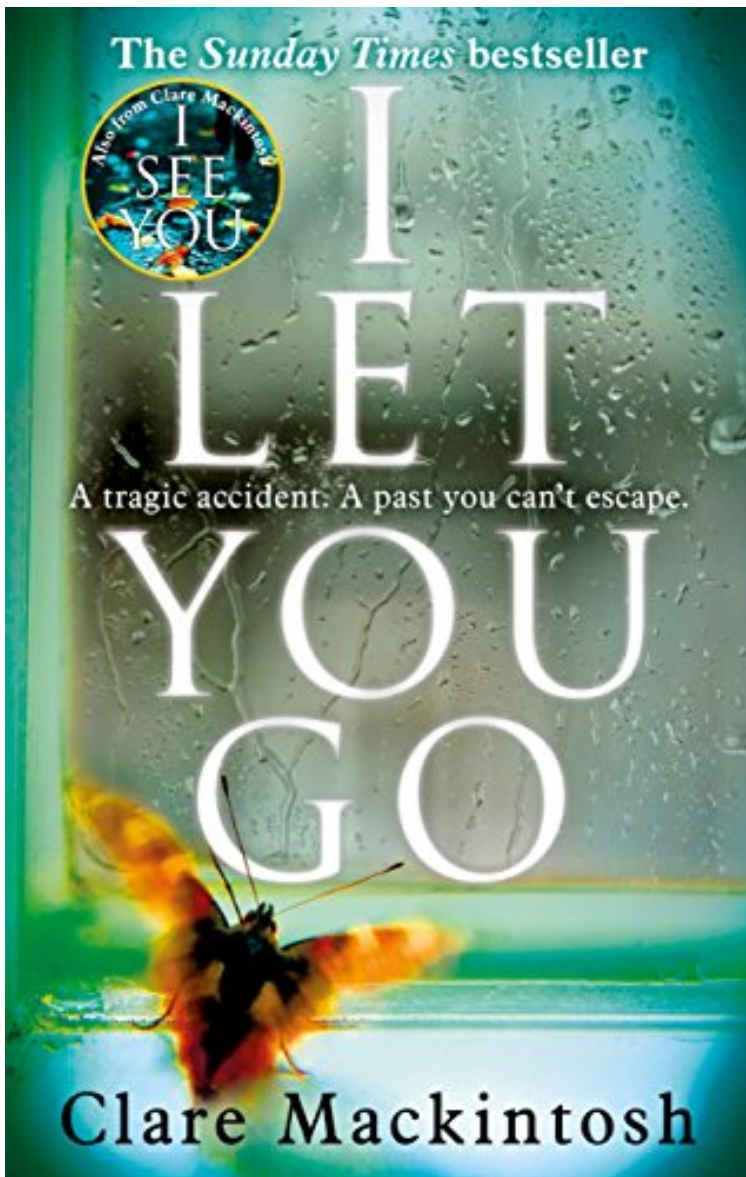


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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTHE SENSATIONAL SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER and winner of the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year 2016A tragic accident. It all happened so quickly. She couldn't have prevented it. Could she?In a split second, Jenna Gray's world descends into a nightmare. Her only hope of moving on is to walk away from everything she knows to start afresh. Desperate to escape, Jenna moves to a remote cottage on the Welsh coast, but she is haunted by her fears, her grief and her memories of a cruel November night that changed her life forever.Slowly, Jenna begins to glimpse the potential for happiness in her future. But her past is about to catch up with her, and the consequences will be devastating . . .**Let Me Lie, the sensational third thriller by Clare Mackintosh is available for pre-order now**Extrait***This

excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof***Copyright 2016 Clare MackintoshPROLOGUEThe wind flicks wet hair across her face, and she screws up her eyes against the rain. Weather like this makes everyone hurry; scurrying past on slippery pavements with chins buried into collars. Passing cars send spray over their shoes; the noise from the traffic making it impossible for her to hear more than a few words of the chattering update that began the moment the school gates opened. The words burst from him without a break, mixed up and back to front in the excitement of this new world into which he is growing. She makes out something about a best friend; a project on space; a new teacher, and she looks down and smiles at his excitement, ignoring the cold that weaves its way through her scarf. The boy grins back and tips up his head to taste the rain; wet eyelashes forming dark clumps around his eyes. And I can write my name, Mummy! You clever boy, she says, stopping to kiss him fiercely on his damp forehead. Will you show me when you get home? They walk as quickly as five-year-old legs will allow, her free hand holding his bag, which bangs against her knees. Nearly home. Headlights glint on wet tarmac, the dazzle blinding them every few seconds. Waiting for a break in the traffic they duck across the busy road, and she tightens her grip on the small hand inside the soft woolen glove, so he has to run to keep up. Sodden leaves cling to the railings, their bright colors darkening to a dull brown. They reach the quiet street where home lies just around the corner, its seductive warmth a welcome thought. Secure in the environs of her own neighborhood she lets go of his hand to push away the strands of wet hair from her eyes, laughing at the cascade of droplets it causes. There, she says, as they make the final turn. I left the light on for us. Across the street, a redbrick house. Two bedrooms, the tiniest kitchen, and a garden crammed with pots she always means to fill with flowers. Just the two of them. Ill race you, Mummy . . . He never stops moving; full of energy from the second he wakes until the moment his head hits the pillow. Always jumping, always running. Come on! It happens in a heartbeat; the feeling of space by her side as he runs toward home, seeking out the warmth of the hall, with its porch-light glow. Milk; biscuit; twenty minutes of television; fish-fingers for tea. The routine they have fallen into so quickly, barely halfway through that first term at school. The car comes from nowhere. The squeal of wet brakes, the thud of a five-year-old boy hitting the windshield and the spin of his body before it slams onto the road. Running after him, in front of the still-moving car. Slipping and falling heavily onto outstretched hands, the impact taking her breath away. Its over in a heartbeat. She crouches beside him, searching frantically for a pulse. Watches her breath form a solitary white cloud in the air. Sees the dark shadow form beneath his head and hears her own wail as though it comes from someone else. She looks up at the blurred windshield, its wipers sending arcs of water into the darkening night, and she screams at the unseen driver to help her. Leaning forward to warm the boy with her body, she holds her coat open over them both, its hem drinking surface water from the road. And as she kisses him and begs him to wake, the pool of yellow light that envelops them shrinks to a narrow beam; the car backs up the street. Engine whining in admonishment, the car makes two, three, four attempts to turn in the narrow street, scraping in its haste against one of the huge sycamore sentries lining the road. And then it is dark. PART ONE Detective Inspector Ray Stevens stood next to the window and contemplated his office chair, on which an arm had been broken for at least a year. Until now he had simply taken the pragmatic approach of not leaning on the left side, but while he was at lunch someone had scrawled Defective in black marker pen across the back of it. Ray wondered if Business Supports newfound enthusiasm for equipment audits would extend to a replacement, or whether he was destined to run Bristol CID from a chair that cast serious doubts over his credibility. Leaning forward to find a marker pen in his chaotic top drawer, Ray crouched down and changed the label to Detective. The door to his office opened and he hastily stood up, replacing the lid on the pen. Ah, Kate, I was just . . . He stopped, recognizing the look on her face almost before he saw the Command and Control printout in her hand. What have you got? A hit-and-run in Fishponds, gov. Five-year-old boy killed. Ray stretched out a hand for the piece of paper and scanned it while Kate stood awkwardly in the doorway. Fresh from shift, she had only been on CID for a couple of months and was still finding her feet. She was good though: better than she knew. No registration number? Not as far as we know. Shift have got the scene contained and the skippers taking a statement from the child's mother as we speak. She's badly in shock, as you can imagine. Are you all right to stay late? Ray asked, but Kate was nodding before he'd even finished the question. They exchanged half-smiles in mutual acknowledgement of the adrenaline rush it always felt so wrong to enjoy when something so horrific had happened. Right then, let's go. They nodded a greeting to the throng of smokers clustered under cover by the back door. All right, Stumpy? Ray said. I'm taking Kate out to the Fish-ponds hit-and-run. Can you get on to Area Intelligence and see if anything comes in yet? Will do. The older man took a final drag of his roll-up. Detective Sergeant Jake Owen had been called Stumpy for so much of his

career that it was always a surprise to hear his full name read out in court. A man of few words, Stumpy had more war stories than he chose to share, and was without a shadow of a doubt Rays best DS. The two men had been on shift together for several years, and with a strength that belied his small stature, Stumpy was a handy crewmate to have on your side. In addition to Kate, Stumpys team included the steady Malcolm Johnson and young Dave Hillsdon, an enthusiastic but maverick DC, whose determined efforts to secure convictions sailed a little too close to the wind for Rays liking. Together they made a good team, and Kate was learning fast from them. She had a fiery passion that made Ray nostalgic for his days as a hungry DC, before seventeen years of bureaucracy had ground him down. Kate drove the unmarked Corsa through mounting rush-hour traffic to Fishponds. She was an impatient driver; tutting when a red light held them back, and craning her neck to see past a holdup. She was perpetually in motion: tapping fingers on the steering wheel, screwing up her nose, shifting in her seat. As the traffic started moving again, she leaned forward as though the movement would propel them forward faster. Missing blues and twos? Ray said. Kate grinned. Maybe a bit. There was eyeliner smudged around her eyes, but otherwise her face was clean of makeup. Dark brown curls fell messily about her face, despite the tortoiseshell clip presumably intended to hold them back. Ray fished for his mobile to make the necessary calls, confirming that the Collision Investigation Unit was en route, the duty superintendent had been informed, and that someone had called out the Ops wagona lumbering vehicle stuffed to the gunnels with tenting, emergency lights, and hot drinks. Everything had been done. In all honesty, he thought, it always had been, but as duty DI the buck stopped with him. There was usually a bit of hackle-rising from shift when CID turned up and started going over old ground, but that was just the way it had to be. Theyd all been through it; even Ray, who had spent as little time in uniform as possible before moving on. He spoke to Control Room to let them know they were five minutes away, but didnt call home. Ray had taken to phoning Mags instead on the rare occasion when he was going to be on time, which seemed a much more practical approach to the long hours the job demanded of him. As they rounded the corner Kate slowed the car to a crawl. Half a dozen police cars were strewn haphazardly down the street; lights throwing a blue glow across the scene every other second. Floodlights were mounted on metal tripods, their strong beams picking out the fine mist of rain, which had thankfully abated in the last hour. Kate had stopped on their way out of the station to grab a coat and exchange her heels for wellies. Practicality before style, she had laughed, throwing the shoes into her locker and pulling on the boots. Ray rarely gave much thought to either principle, but he wished now hed at least brought a coat. They parked the car a hundred meters away from a large white tent, erected in an attempt to protect from the rain whatever evidence might have been left. One side of the tent was open, and inside they could see a crime scene investigator on her hands and knees, swabbing at something unseen. Farther up the road a second paper-suited figure was examining one of the huge trees that lined the road. As Ray and Kate drew near to the scene they were stopped by a young PC, his fluorescent jacket zipped so high Ray could barely make out a face between the peak of his hat and his collar. Evening, sir. Do you need to come in? Ill have to sign you in. No, thank you, said Ray. Can you tell me where your sergeant is? Hes at the mothers house, the PC said. He pointed down the street to a row of small terraced houses before retreating into his col- lar. Number four, came the muffled afterthought. God, thats a miserable job, said Ray, as he and Kate walked away. I remember doing a twelve-hour scene watch in the pouring rain when I was a probationer, then getting told off by the DCI for not smiling when he turned up at eight oclock the next morning. Kate laughed. Is that why you specialized? Not entirely, Ray said, but it was certainly part of the appeal. No, it was mainly because I was sick of passing all the big jobs over to the specialists and never seeing anything through to the end. How about you? Sort of similar. They reached the row of houses the PC had pointed toward. Kate carried on talking as they looked for number four. I like dealing with the more serious jobs. But mainly its because I get bored easily. I like complicated investigations that make my head hurt to figure them out. Cryptic crosswords rather than simple ones. Does that make sense? Perfect sense, said Ray. Although Ive always been useless at cryptic crosswords. Theres a knack, said Kate. Ill teach you sometime. Here we are, number four. The front door was smartly painted and slightly ajar. Ray pushed it open and called inside. CID. All right if we come in? In the sitting room, came the response. They wiped their feet and walked up the narrow hallway, pushing past an overloaded coat rack, beneath which sat a pair of childs red wellies, neatly placed beside an adult pair. The childs mother was sitting on a small sofa, her eyes fixed on the blue drawstring school bag clutched on her lap. Im Detective Inspector Ray Stevens. Im so sorry to hear about your son. She looked up at him, twisting the drawstring so tightly around her hands the cord gouged red grooves in her skin. Jacob, she said, dry-eyed. His name is Jacob. Perched on a kitchen chair next to the sofa, a uniformed

sergeant was balancing paperwork on his lap. Ray had seen him around the station but didn't know his name. He glanced at his badge. Brian, would you mind taking Kate into the kitchen and filling her in on what you've got so far? I'd like to ask the witness a few questions, if that's okay? It won't take long. Perhaps you could make her a cup of tea at the same time. From the reaction on Brian's face, it was clear this was the last thing he wanted to do, but he stood up and left the room with Kate, no doubt to moan to her about CID pulling rank. Ray didn't dwell on it. I'm sorry to ask you even more questions, but it's vital we get as much information as we can, as early as possible. Jacobs' mother nodded, but didn't look up. I understand you couldn't see the car's number plate? It happened so quickly, she said, the words triggering a release of emotion. He was talking about school, and then . . . I only let go for a second. She pulled the drawstring cord tighter round her hand, and Ray watched the color drain from her fingers. It was so fast. The car came so fast. She answered his questions quietly, giving no sign of the frustration she must surely be feeling. Ray hated causing such intrusion, but he had no choice. What did the driver look like? I couldn't see inside, she said. Were there passengers? I couldn't see inside the car, she repeated, her voice dull and wooden. Right, said Ray. Where on earth were they going to start? She looked at him. Will you find him? The man who killed Jacob. Will you find him? Her voice cracked and the words fell apart, morphing into a low moan. She bent forward, hugging the school bag into her stomach, and Ray felt a tightening in his chest. He took a deep breath, forcing the feeling away. We'll do everything we can, he said, despising himself for the cliché. Kate came back from the kitchen with Brian behind her, carrying a mug of tea. All right if I finish this statement now, guv? he asked. Stop upsetting my witness, you mean, Ray thought. Yes, thank you. Sorry for interrupting. Got everything we need, Kate? Kate nodded. She looked pale, and he wondered if Brian had said something to upset her. In a year or so he would know her as well as he knew the rest of the team, but he hadn't quite sussed her out yet. She was outspoken, he knew that much, not too nervous to put her point across at team meetings, and she learned fast. They left the house and walked in silence back to the car. Are you okay? he asked, although it was clear she wasn't. Her jaw was rigid; the color had completely drained from her face. Fine, Kate said, but her voice was thick and Ray realized she was trying not to cry. Hey, he said, reaching out and putting an awkward arm round her shoulder, is it the job? Over the years Ray had built a defensive mechanism against the fall-out of cases like this one. Most police officers had one: it's why you had to turn a blind eye to some of the jokes bandied about the cafeteria but perhaps Kate was different. She nodded and took a deep, juddering breath. I'm sorry, I'm not normally like this, I promise. I've done dozens of death knocks, but . . . God, he was five years old! Apparently Jacobs' father never wanted anything to do with him, so it's always been the two of them. I can't imagine what she's going through. Her voice cracked, and Ray felt the tightness in his chest return. His coping mechanism relied on focusing on the investigation on the hard evidence before them and not dwelling too deeply on the emotions of the people involved. If he thought too long about how it must feel to watch your child die in your arms, he would be no use to anyone, not least to Jacob and his mother. Ray's thoughts flicked involuntarily to his own children, and he had an irrational desire to call home and check they were both safe. Sorry. Kate swallowed and gave an embarrassed smile. I promise I won't always be like this. Hey, it's okay, Ray said. We've all been there. She raised an eyebrow. Even you? I didn't have you down as the sensitive type, boss. I have my moments. Ray squeezed her shoulder before taking his arm away. He didn't think he'd ever actually shed tears at a job, but he'd come pretty close. You going to be okay? I'll be fine. Thank you. As they pulled away, Kate looked back at the scene, where the CSIs were still hard at work. What sort of bastard kills a five-year-old boy, then drives off? Ray didn't hesitate. That's exactly what we're going to find out. I don't want a cup of tea, but I take it anyway. Cradling the mug in both hands I press my face into the steam until it scalds me. Pain pricks my skin, deadening my cheeks and stinging my eyes. I fight the instinct to pull away; I need the numbness to blur the scenes that won't leave my head. Shall I get you something to eat? He towers over me and I know I should look up, but I can't bear to. How can he offer me food and drink as though nothing has happened? A wave of nausea wells up inside me and I swallow the acrid taste back down. He blames me for it. He hasn't said so, but he doesn't have to, it's there in his eyes. And he's right: it was my fault. We should have gone home a different way; I shouldn't have talked; I should have stopped him . . . No, thank you, I say quietly, I'm not hungry. The accident plays on a loop in my head. I want to press pause but the film is relentless: his body slamming against the windshield time after time after time. I raise the mug to my face again, but the tea has cooled and the warmth on my skin isn't enough to hurt. I can't feel the tears forming, but fat droplets burst as they hit my knees. I watch them soak into my jeans, and scratch my nail across a smear of clay on my thigh. I look around the room at the home I have spent so many years creating. The curtains, bought to match the

cushions; the artwork, some of my own, some I found in galleries and loved too much to leave behind. I thought I was making a home, but I was only ever building a house. My hand hurts. I can feel my pulse beating rapid and light in my wrist. Im glad of the pain. I wish it were more. I wish it had been me the car hit. Hes talking again. Police are out everywhere looking for the car . . . the papers will appeal for witnesses . . . it will be on the news . . . The room spins and I fix my gaze on the coffee table, nodding when it seems appropriate. He strides two paces to the window, then back again. I wish he would sit down hes making me nervous. My hands are shaking and I put down my untouched tea before I drop it, but I clatter the china against the glass tabletop. He shoots me a look of frustration. Sorry, I say. Theres a metallic taste in my mouth, and I realize Ive bitten through the inside of my lip. I swallow the blood, not wanting to draw attention to myself by asking for a tissue. Everything has changed. The instant the car slid across the wet tarmac, my whole life changed. I can see everything clearly, as though I am standing on the sidelines. I cant go on like this. When I wake, for a second Im not sure what this feeling is. Everything is the same, and yet everything has changed. Then, before I have even opened my eyes, there is a rush of noise in my head, like an underground train. And there it is: playing out in Technicolor scenes I cant pause or mute. I press the heels of my palms into my temples as though I can make the images subside through brute force alone, but still they come, thick and fast, as if without them I might forget. On my bedside cabinet is the brass alarm clock Eve gave me when I went to university. Because youll never get to lectures, otherwise and Im shocked to see its ten thirty already. The pain in my hand has been overshadowed by a headache that blinds me if I move my head too fast, and as I peel myself from the bed every muscle aches. I pull on yesterdays clothes and go into the garden without stopping to make a coffee, even though my mouth is so dry its an effort to swallow. I cant find my shoes, and the frost stings my feet as I make my way across the grass. The garden isnt large, but winter is on its way, and by the time I reach the other side I cant feel my toes. My garden studio has been my sanctuary for the last five years. Little more than a shed to the casual observer, it is where I come to think, to work, and to escape. The wooden floor is stained from the lumps of clay that drop from my wheel, firmly placed in the center of the room, where I can move around it and stand back to view my work with a critical eye. Three sides of the shed are lined with shelves on which I place my sculptures, in an ordered chaos only I could understand. Works in progress, here; fired but not painted, here; waiting to go to customers, here. Hundreds of separate pieces, yet if I shut my eyes, I can still feel the shape of each one beneath my fingers, the wetness of the clay on my palms. I take the key from its hiding place under the window ledge and open the door. Its worse than I thought. The floor lies unseen beneath a carpet of broken clay; rounded halves of pots ending abruptly in angry jagged peaks. The wooden shelves are all empty, my desk swept clear of work, and the tiny figurines on the window ledge are unrecognizable, crushed into shards that glisten in the sunlight. By the door lies a small statuette of a woman. I made her last year, as part of a series of figures I produced for a shop in Clifton. I had wanted to produce something real, something as far from perfection as it was possible to get, and yet for it still to be beautiful. I made ten women, each with their own distinctive curves, their own bumps and scars and imperfections. I based them on my mother; my sister; girls I taught at pottery class; women I saw walking in the park. This one is me. Loosely, and not so anyone would recognize, but nevertheless me. Chest a little too flat; hips a little too narrow; feet a little too big. A tangle of hair twisted into a knot at the base of the neck. I bend down and pick her up. I had thought her intact, but as I touch her the clay moves beneath my hands, and Im left with two broken pieces. I look at them, then I hurl them with all my strength toward the wall, where they shatter into tiny pieces that shower down onto my desk. I take a deep breath and let it slowly out. Im not sure how many days have passed since the accident, or how I have moved through the week when I feel as though Im dragging my legs through molasses. I dont know what it is that makes me decide today is the day. But it is. I take only what will fit into my holdall, knowing that if I dont go right now, I might not be able to leave at all. I walk haphazardly about the house, trying to imagine never being here again. The thought is both terrifying and liberating. Can I do this? Is it possible to simply walk away from one life and start another? I have to try: it is my only chance of getting through this in one piece. My laptop is in the kitchen. It holds photos; addresses; important information I might one day need and hadnt thought to save elsewhere. I dont have time to think about doing this now, and although its heavy and awkward I add it to my bag. I dont have much room left, but I cant leave without one final piece of my past. I discard a jumper and a fistful of T-shirts, making room instead for the wooden box in which my memories are hidden, crammed one on top of another beneath the cedar lid. I dont look inside I dont need to. The assortment of teenage diaries, erratically kept and with regretted pages torn from their bindings; an elastic band full of concert tickets; my graduation certificate;

clippings from my first exhibition. And the photos of the son I loved with an intensity that seemed impossible. Precious photographs. So few for someone so loved. Such a small impact on the world, yet the very center of my own. Unable to resist, I open the box and pick up the uppermost photo: a Polaroid taken by a soft-spoken midwife on the day he was born. He is a tiny scrap of pink, barely visible beneath the white hospital blanket. In the photo my arms are fixed in the awkward pose of the new mother, drowning in love and exhaustion. It had all been so rushed, so frightening, so unlike the books I had devoured during my pregnancy, but the love I had to offer never faltered. Suddenly unable to breathe, I place the photo back and push the box into my holdall. Jacobs death is front-page news. It screams at me from the petrol station I pass, from the corner shop, and from the bus-stop queue where I stand as though I am no different than anyone else. As though I am not running away. Everyone is talking about the accident. How could it have happened? Who could have done it? Each bus stop brings fresh news, and the snatches of gossip float back across our heads, impossible for me to avoid. It was a black car. It was a red car. The police are close to an arrest. The police have no leads. A woman sits next to me. She opens her newspaper and suddenly it feels as though someone is pressing on my chest. Jacobs face stares at me; bruised eyes rebuking me for not protecting him, for letting him die. I force myself to look at him, and a hard knot tightens in my throat. My vision blurs and I cant read the words, but I dont need to. Ive seen a version of this article in every paper Ive passed today. The quotes from devastated teachers; the notes on flowers by the side of the road; the inquest opened and then adjourned. A second photo shows a wreath of yellow chrysanthemums on an impossibly tiny coffin. The woman tuts and starts talking: half to herself, I think, but perhaps she feels I will have a view. Terrible, isnt it? And just before Christmas, too. I say nothing. Driving off like that without stopping. She tuts again. Mind you, she continues, five years old. What kind of mother allows a child that age to cross a road on his own? I cant help it. I let out a sob. Without my realizing, hot tears stream down my cheeks and into the tissue pushed gently into my hand. Poor lamb, the woman says, as though soothing a small child. Its not clear if she means me, or Jacob. You cant imagine, can you? But I can, and I want to tell her that, whatever she is imagining, it is a thousand times worse. She finds me another tissue, crumpled but clean, and turns the page of her newspaper to read about the Clifton Christmas lights switch-on. I never thought I would run away. I never thought I would need to. *Revue de presse* Astonishingly good. Lee Child, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author of *Make Me* On the level of the movie *The Sixth Sense* for its cleverness. This kind of sharp, cunning writing makes one eagerly look forward to Mackintoshs next novel. *Shelf Awareness* You'll be shocked by the twist in the middle of *I Let You Go* just don't spoil it for everyone else! *PopSugar* Jaw-dropping the kind of book that sticks in the readers mind well after the final sentence. *Kirkus* (starred review) A wonderfully layered thriller that skillfully builds from that one tragic event. It makes a good match for fans of Sophie Hannah and Erin Kelly. *Library Journal* (starred review) Mind-bending. *Booklist* [An] accomplished debut keeps readers on their toes. *Publishers Weekly* A terrific, compelling read with an astonishing twist that floored me. Peter James, author of *Want You Dead* Addictive one thrill after another. Samantha Hayes, author of *What You Left Behind* A hugely assured and gripping debut and a twist that made me green with envy. Mark Billingham, author of *Time of Death* From the Hardcover edition.