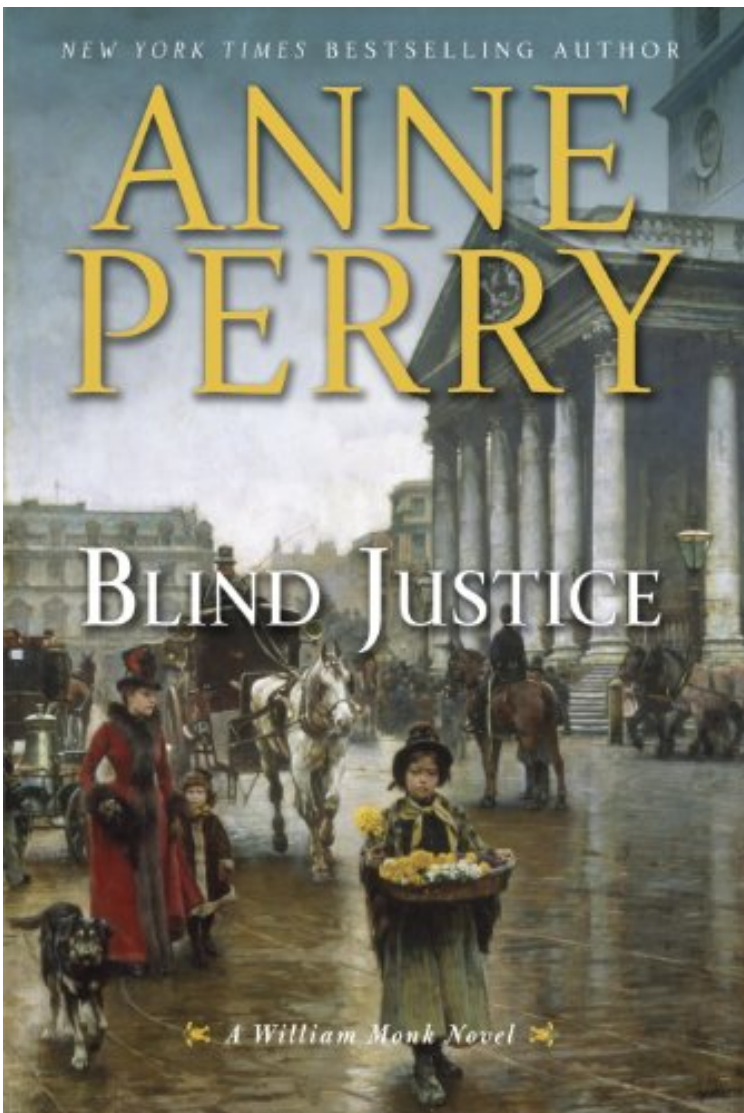


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Blind Justice: A William Monk Novel



Par Anne Perry
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur NATIONAL BESTSELLER For a generation, Anne Perrys New York Times bestselling novels have invited readers to explore the brilliantly seductive heart of Victorian London, where great wealth and great evil live side by side, and great men sometimes make unfortunate choices. In Blind Justice, Hester Monk, the wife of William Monk, commander of the Thames River Police, questions the finances of a London church whose members hard-earned charitable gifts appear to have ended up in the pocket of charismatic preacher Abel Taft, paying for his fine home and the stylish outfits of his wife and daughters. Taft is accused of extortion, and brilliant barrister Oliver Rathbone, newly appointed a judge, is chosen to preside over his trial. It seems clear that Taft is indeed guilty. However, at the last second, the defense produces a witness who completely undermines the charges. Then Rathbone makes a well-meaning

but reckless move that could ruin his career, his reputation, and his life. Blind Justice presents a rich and lively panorama of London life, from the teeming Thames docks to the wealthy West End, while unfolding a magnificent courtroom drama. And while justice, law, and morality hang in the balance, Hester and Monk race to save their distinguished friend Rathbone from disgrace. The incomparable art of Anne Perry grips us fast until the final, unforgettable scene. **BONUS:** This edition includes an excerpt from Anne Perry's Blood on the Water. **Praise for Blind Justice** A staggering achievement . . . Perrys command of plot and prose shines. **Bookreporter** Ranks among the best [Anne] Perry has written. Her courtroom scenes have the realism of Scott Turow. **Huntington News Gripping** . . . Those who love Victorian England will relish Ms. Perrys presentation of period details. Her mastery of this time and place gives credence to the characters moral and legal struggles. **New York Journal of Books** Praise for Anne Perry and her William Monk novels *A Sunless Sea* Anne Perrys Victorian mysteries are marvels. **The New York Times** Book *Acceptable Loss* Masterful storytelling and moving dialogue. **The Star-Ledger** *Execution Dock* [An] engrossing page-turner . . . There's no one better at using words to paint a scene and then fill it with sounds and smells than Anne Perry. **The Boston Globe** *Dark Assassin* Brilliant . . . a page-turning thriller . . . blending compelling plotting with superbly realized human emotion and exquisite period detail. **Jeffery Deaver**, author of *Edge* *The Shifting Tide* The mysterious and dangerous waterfront world of Londons longest street, the Thames, comes to life. **South Florida Sun-Sentinel** *Extrait* chapter 1 Hester let the hansom cab pass, then crossed Portpool Lane and went in through the door to the clinic for sick and injured prostitutes. Ruby saw her and her scarred face lit up with welcome. Is Miss Raleigh in? Hester asked. Rubys shoulders slumped. Yes, ma'am, but she don't look right. I thought as she were made for the job, like, but this mornin you'da thought she'd got left at the altar. All weepin an can't believe it, like. Hester was stunned. When she had hired Josephine a few weeks earlier, the girl had said she was not courting and had no intention of giving up nursing in any imaginable future. Where is she? Do you know? she asked. We got someone in all beat up, blood everywhere. She'll be seen to er, Ruby replied. That were all an hour ago, mind. Thank you. Hester went through the far door and along the passageway, asking after Josephine each time she encountered someone. In the old pantry where they kept medical supplies she finally found her, moving between the shelves, counting and sorting. She was a pretty girl, perhaps too much character in her face to be conventionally beautiful. Now her cheeks were stained with tears, her eyes were blank, and her lips were pressed so tight the muscles were visible along her jaw and in her neck. It was clear that she did not even hear Hester come in. Hester closed the door to give them complete privacy before she spoke. As always, she was direct. Medicine, she had found, was not an art that allowed for much roundabout conversation. Whats wrong? she asked gently. Startled, Josephine swung round to face Hester. She was blinking rapidly as the uncontrolled tears slid down her face. Im sorry. Ill be all right in a moment. She was clearly ashamed at being caught giving way to her distress, whatever it was. Hester put her hand ever so gently on Josephines arm. Something must be very wrong for you to be so upset by it. Youve seen terrible wounds and nursed the dying. Something that hurts you so much isnt going to be dealt with in a few minutes. Tell me what it is. Josephine shook her head. You cant help with this, she answered, her voice choking in her throat. I . . . I need to work. Really . . . Hester did not loosen her grip. There's nothing that anyone can do, Josephine repeated, still attempting to pull away. Hester hesitated. Would it be intrusive if she insisted? She liked this young woman on a deep, instinctive level; she reminded Hester of herself, years ago. And Hester knew exactly the pain and loneliness one felt when starting out in the profession. She had felt the overwhelming sense of helplessness that comes when witnessing the realities of physical agony and death, the moment when things go beyond anyones reach and all you can do is watch. All that, on top of the ordinary heartache of life and youth it had been a difficult burden to bear when she was younger. Even now, at times. Tell me anyway, she said gently. Josephine hesitated, and then straightened herself with an effort. She swallowed hard and fished for a handkerchief to blow her nose. Hester waited, leaving the door closed. No one else could come in without a key. My mother died a long time ago, Josephine began. My father and I have become very close. She took a deep breath and tried to keep her voice level, almost emotionless, as if she were recounting figures in a calculation, something with no personal weight. He has been going to a Nonconformist church for just over a year now. He found many friends among the congregation. He said there was a degree of warmth in it that appealed to him more than the ritual of the Church of England, which he found . . . cold. She swallowed hard again. Hester did not interrupt. So far there was nothing odd, let alone disastrous, in what Josephine was saying. She hadn't known Josephine long, but the girl did not strike her as the type to care exactly which religion her father followed, as long as it was broadly Christian, so that couldn't be the cause of her distress. Josephine took another shaky breath. He told

me that they do a great deal of good work, both here in England and abroad. They need money to provide food, medicines, clothes, and so on, for those in desperate circumstances. She searched Hesters face for understanding. It sounds a very Christian thing to do. Hester filled in the silence. Then a thought occurred to her. Oh dear! Did your father discover that was not what they were using the money for? Josephine looked startled. Oh no! No, it wasnt that. They just ... they wanted so much! They pressured him for more and more. He is not a wealthy man, but he always speaks well, dresses well ... if you know what I mean? Perhaps they thought he was wealthier than he is ... Hester began to understand where this might lead. Josephine was watching her intently now. Her voice wavered. They kept on asking him, and he was embarrassed to decline. It isnt easy to say you cant afford any more, especially when they tell you people are starving, and you know that you can eat whenever you wish, even if it is a modest meal. Hester looked at the pain in the young womans face, in her eyes, at the clenched hands gripping the handkerchief. She seemed frightened, embarrassed, and racked with sadness. They pressed him into giving them much more than he could afford? Hester asked quietly. Josephine nodded, her jaw clenched hard to help her control the emotion that welled up inside her. Is the debt serious? Hester continued. Josephine nodded again, the hopelessness clear in her face. She looked down, as if to avoid the condemnation she obviously expected to see in Hesters eyes. Hester was overwhelmed by a sudden, wrenching memory of her own father, as she had seen him before she left for the Crimea, a dozen years ago, when this young woman was but a child. He had been so proud of her, seeing her off on a noble enterprise. She could smell the salt on the wind again, hear the gulls crying and the creak of ropes as the ship rose and fell, straining against its moorings. That was the last time she had ever seen him. The reasons for his falling into debt had been different than Mr. Raleighs reasons, even if they had also been tied to his compassion and sense of honor; but the pain his debt caused his family was the same. He too had been pressured and then cheated. The shame of it had caused him to take his own life. Hester had been away in the Crimea, nursing men she did not even know, and her family had faced that grief without her. Her mother had been almost unable to bear it and died shortly after the news of her second sons death in the Crimea reached her. Hester had arrived home in England to face her one remaining brothers bereavement and his fury that she had not been there when she was so badly needed, that she had spent her time and her pity on strangers instead. They were still distant, no more between them than the occasional exchange of Christmas cards, the odd stiff letter in formal language now and then. Hester understood sorrow, guilt, helplessness, and the lethal burden of debt more intimately than Josephine Raleigh could have imagined. She realized that Josephine was gazing at her now, confused. She felt foolish for drifting off into her own memories. Im sorry, she said gently. I was thinking of someone I loved ... someone who also suffered, in a similar way. I wasnt able to help him because I was in the Crimea with the army. I didnt come home until it was too late. How deep is your fathers debt? Very, Josephine said quietly. Much more than he can pay. Ive given him everything I have, but its far too late. And I cant earn enough to She stopped. There was no point in explaining what was so obvious. Hesters mind raced, searching for something to say that might help; her painful memories still churned, the hopelessness, the despair of being too late to help, and the ache she still felt to turn back time and do everything differently. When she spoke her voice was husky. I imagine these people ask every member of the congregation whom they think might have anything to give to donate? Josephine gulped. Yes ... I ... I think so. Footsteps sounded in the passage outside, hesitated, then went on. Well. Maybe there is something dishonest about the whole thing, Hester said thoughtfully. To pressure people that way isnt ... right ... even if its not illegal. Maybe there was a reason. I dont know. I will ask my husband. He is a police officer. There might be something we can do. Josephines face filled with distress. Oh no! Please dont ... my father would be mortified! The shame would be She gulped again and all but choked. It would make him look as if he were ... reluctant to have given charity to those in far more need than any of us. It would be Josephine! Hester said quickly, feeling the heat wash up her face. Of course I wouldnt reveal his name or his circumstances to anyone. I have no intention of being so clumsy. I am aware that would humiliate him. Josephine shook her head. You dont understand? Yes I do, Hester replied. She took a minute to weigh her next words before continuing. The man I was thinking of a minute ago was my own father. I think the shame of what happened to him was what killed him. So I do understand. I shall look into this as far as I can, without mentioning any names, I promise you. Josephine was still uncertain. If he finds out, he will think Ive betrayed him. He wont know anything of it, Hester promised again. Dont you think he would want to prevent others from suffering in the same way? And for that matter, I would be surprised if he is the only one of the congregation in this position. Wouldnt you? I ... I suppose so. But how will you do it? I dont know yet. Perhaps I will have no clear idea until I try, Hester admitted. But if people are being forced

into this position, it must be stopped. Josephine gave a very slight smile. Thank you. Hester smiled back at her. Where is this church, and what is the name of the man who leads it? Abel Taft is his name. The church is on the corner of Wilmington Square and Yardley Street, Josephine replied, frowning. But you live on the south side of the river, miles away! How will you explain going to a church up there? Hester smiled more widely. Their reputation for true and active Christianity, of course! she replied sarcastically. Josephine laughed in spite of herself, and tears of gratitude filled her eyes. She shook herself abruptly, straightened her shoulders, and smoothed the skirt of the gray dress. I have work to do, she said more steadily. I'm all behind myself. There were times, especially in the winter, when William Monk found his duties as commander of the Thames River Police to be more arduous than usual. The knife-edge of ice on the wind across the open water could cut through almost anything, except oilskins. It whipped the flesh raw on exposed cheeks and froze the heavy cloth of trouser legs when the rain or the river water dampened them. But this late spring evening was balmy, and over the shining water arched a pale blue, almost cloudless sky. The breeze was welcome, the tide was high, and there were no naked banks exposed, which meant there was no dank smell of mud. Pleasure boats passed by with colored banners waving, laughter drifting toward the shore where a hurdy-gurdy played a popular song from the current music-hall shows. All the warm hope of summer lay ahead. It was a perfect time to be finishing a patrol on the river and thinking of going home. Monk had always managed a boat easily. It was one of the skills from his forgotten past, although his memory of how he acquired the ability had been obliterated by an injury in a carriage crash, just before he had first met Hester, nine years ago, in 1856. It always fascinated him that the mind could erase all sorts of things that the body seemed to recall. With ease he brought the police boat to the bottom of the dock steps, shipped the oars, and stepped out with the mooring rope in his hand. He tied it loosely so that later on the receding water would not strain it and walked up the steps to make his final report at the station. He spoke briefly with Orme, his second in command, made a last check of everything else, and half an hour later he was back on the water again this time as passenger in a ferry as it approached the dock at Princes Stairs, on the south bank at Rotherhithe. He paid the fare and walked up the hill toward his home on Paradise Place, the panorama of the Pool of London behind him, black masts and cross spars against the fading sky, water still as polished silk. He found Hester in the kitchen, stirring something on the stove, and Scuff, the onetime mudlark they had adopted or, more accurately who had adopted them sitting hopefully at the table, waiting for supper. He had been more or less resident for nearly two years now and was beginning to take them rather more for granted, as if finally he had accepted that this was his home, that they would not suddenly change their minds and turn him out back onto the dockside. He had grown considerably since they had taken him in. There was a lot of difference between a half-starved boy of eleven Scuff's own estimate of his age, though they couldn't confirm it and a boy of thirteen, who eats at every possible opportunity, mealtimes or not. He was several inches taller and was beginning to appear less angular; he no longer looked as if a sharp twist would break his bones. He was also beginning to acquire a rather self-conscious dignity. Instead of unabashed pleasure, he now welcomed Monk with a grin, but remained seated, far too grown up to give away his emotions. Smiling to himself, Monk acknowledged Scuff equally casually and went over to Hester to give a much warmer and completely spontaneous greeting. They spoke of the day and its events. Scuff reported on his time at school, an experience that was only slowly becoming familiar to him. It had not been easy; he had always been able to count, and he knew the value of money to the farthing. *Revue de presse* Praise for *Blind Justice* A staggering achievement . . . Perry's command of plot and prose shines. *Bookreporter* Ranks among the best [Anne] Perry has written. Her courtroom scenes have the realism of Scott Turow. *Huntington News* Gripping . . . 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