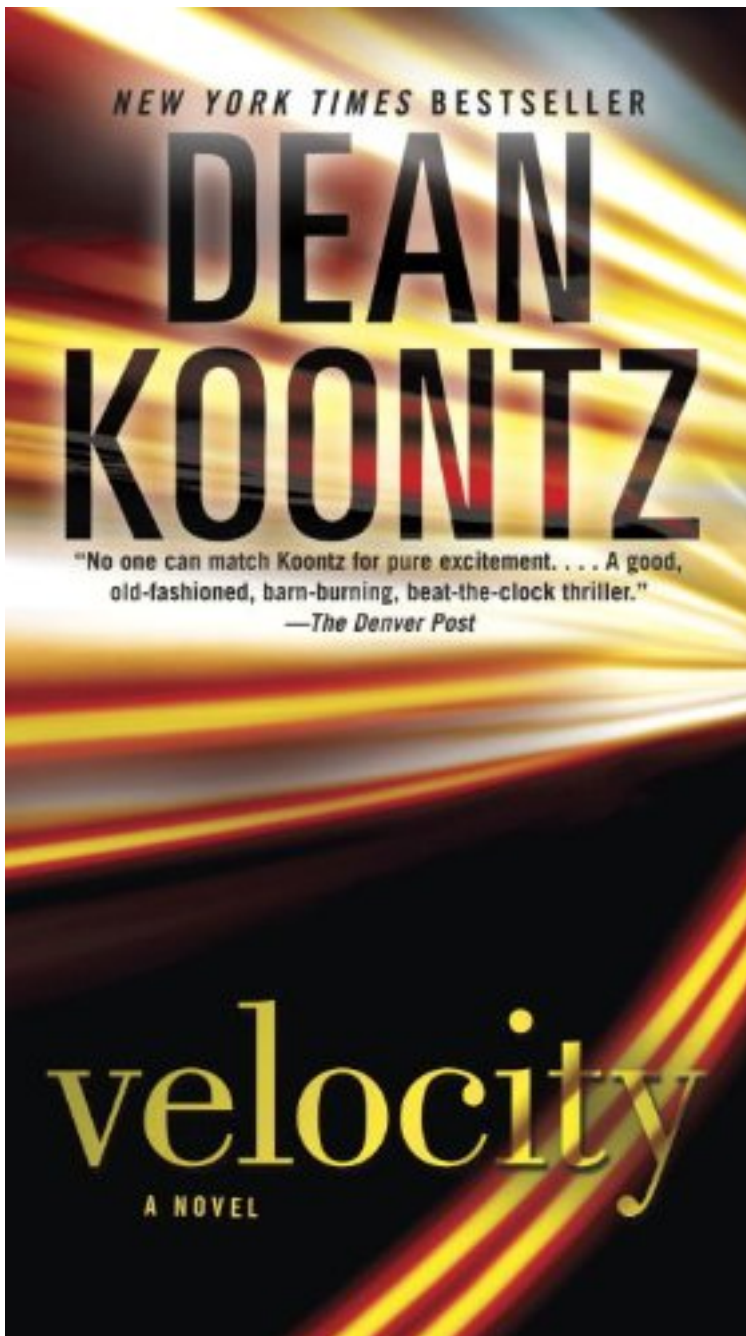


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Velocity: A Novel



Par Dean Koontz
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERThis ebook edition contains a special preview of Dean Koontzs The Silent Corner. If you dont take this note to the police . . . I will kill a lovely blond schoolteacher. . . . If you do . . . I will instead kill an elderly woman active in charity work. You have six

hours to decide. The choice is yours. The typewritten note under his windshield seems like just a sick joke. But in less than twenty-four hours, Billy Wiles, an ordinary, hardworking guy, is about to see his life take on the speed of a nightmare. Because a young blond schoolteacher is murdered and now Billy has another note.

And another deadline. This time he knows its no joke. Hes racing a killer faster than evil itself. And Billy must accept his terrifying challenge: The choice is yours. Think fast. Fear never slows down. . . .

ExtraitPart 1
The Choice is Yours
Chapter One

With draft beer and a smile, Ned Pearsall raised a toast to his deceased neighbor, Henry Friddle, whose death greatly pleased him. Henry had been killed by a garden gnome. He had fallen off the roof of his two-story house, onto that cheerful-looking figure. The gnome was made of concrete. Henry wasnt. A broken neck, a cracked skull: Henry perished on impact. This death-by-gnome had occurred four years previously. Ned Pearsall still toasted Henrys passing at least once a week. Now, from a stool near the curve of the polished mahogany bar, an out-of-towner, the only other customer, expressed curiosity at the enduring nature of Neds animosity. How bad a neighbor could the poor guy have been that youre still so juiced about him? Ordinarily, Ned might have ignored the question. He had even less use for tourists than he did for pretzels. The tavern offered free bowls of pretzels because they were cheap. Ned preferred to sustain his thirst with well-salted peanuts. To keep Ned tipping, Billy Wiles, tending bar, occasionally gave him a bag of Planters. Most of the time Ned had to pay for his nuts. This rankled him either because he could not grasp the economic realities of tavern operation or because he enjoyed being rankled, probably the latter. Although he had a head reminiscent of a squash ball and the heavy rounded shoulders of a sumo wrestler, Ned was an athletic man only if you thought barroom jabber and grudge-holding qualified as sports. In those events, he was an Olympian. Regarding the late Henry Friddle, Ned could be as talkative with outsiders as with lifelong residents of Vineyard Hills. When, as now, the only other customer was a stranger, Ned found silence even less congenial than conversation with a foreign devil. Billy himself had never been much of a talker, never one of those barkeeps who considered the bar a stage. He was a listener. To the out-of-towner, Ned declared, Henry Friddle was a pig. The stranger had hair as black as coal dust with traces of ash at the temples, gray eyes bright with dry amusement, and a softly resonant voice. Thats a strong word pig. You know what the pervert was doing on his roof? He was trying to piss on my dining-room windows. Wiping the bar, Billy Wiles didnt even glance at the tourist. Hed heard this story so often that he knew all the reactions to it. Friddle, the pig, figured the altitude would give his stream more distance, Ned explained. The stranger said, What was he an aeronautical engineer? He was a college professor. He taught contemporary literature. Maybe reading that stuff drove him to suicide, the tourist said, which made him more interesting than Billy had first thought. No, no, Ned said impatiently. The fall was accidental. Was he drunk? Why would you think he was drunk? Ned wondered. The stranger shrugged. He climbed on a roof to urinate on your windows. He was a sick man, Ned explained, plinking one finger against his empty glass to indicate the desire for another round. Drawing Budweiser from the tap, Billy said, Henry Friddle was consumed by vengeance. After silent communion with his brew, the tourist asked Ned Pearsall, Vengeance? So you urinated on Friddles windows first? It wasnt the same thing at all, Ned warned in a rough tone that advised the outsider to avoid being judgmental. Ned didnt do it from his roof, Billy said. Thats right. I walked up to his house, like a man, stood on his lawn, and aimed at his dining-room windows. Henry and his wife were having dinner at the time, Billy said. Before the tourist might express revulsion at the timing of this assault, Ned said, They were eating quail, for Gods sake. You showered their windows because they were eating quail? Ned sputtered with exasperation. No, of course not. Do I look insane to you? He rolled his eyes at Billy. Billy raised his eyebrows as though to say What do you expect of a tourist? Im just trying to convey how pretentious they were, Ned clarified, always eating quail or snails, or Swiss chard. Phony bastards, the tourist said with such a light seasoning of mockery that Ned Pearsall didnt detect it, although Billy did. Exactly, Ned confirmed. Henry Friddle drove a Jaguar, and his wife drove a caryou wont believe this a car made in Sweden. Detroit was too common for them, said the tourist. Exactly. How much of a snob do you have to be to bring a car all the way from Sweden? The tourist said, Ill wager they were wine connoisseurs. Big time! Did you know them or something? I just know the type. They had a lot of books. Youve got em nailed, Ned declared. Theyd sit on the front porch, sniffing their wine, reading books. Right out in public. Imagine that. But if you didnt pee on their dining-room windows because they were snobs, why did you? A thousand reasons, Ned assured him. The incident of the skunk. The incident of the lawn fertilizer. The dead petunias. And the garden gnome, Billy added as he rinsed glasses in the bar sink. The garden gnome was the last straw, Ned agreed. I can understand being driven to aggressive urination by pink plastic flamingos, said the tourist, but, frankly, not by a gnome. Ned scowled, remembering the

affront. Ariadne gave it my face. Ariadne who? Henry Friddle's wife. You ever heard a more pretentious name? Well, the Friddle part brings it down to earth. She was an art professor at the same college. She sculpted the gnome, created the mold, poured the concrete, painted it herself. Having a sculpture modeled after you can be an honor. The beer foam on Ned's upper lip gave him a rabid appearance as he protested: It was a gnome, pal. A drunken gnome. The nose was as red as an apple. It was carrying a beer bottle in each hand. And its fly was unzipped, Billy added. Thanks so much for reminding me, Ned grumbled. Worse, hanging out of its pants was the head and neck of a dead goose. How creative, said the tourist. At first I didn't know what the hell that meant. Symbolism. Metaphor. Yeah, yeah. I figured it out. Everybody who walked past their place saw it, and got a laugh at my expense. Wouldn't need to see the gnome for that, said the tourist. Misunderstanding, Ned agreed: Right. Just hearing about it, people were laughing. So I busted up the gnome with a sledgehammer. And they sued you. Worse. They set out another gnome. Figuring I'd bust up the first, Ariadne had cast and painted a second. I thought life was mellow here in the wine country. Then they tell me, Ned continued, if I bust up the second one, they'll put a third on the lawn, plus they'll manufacture a bunch and sell 'em at cost to anyone who wants a Ned Pearsall gnome. Sounds like an empty threat, said the tourist. Would there really be people who'd want such a thing? Dozens, Billy assured him. This town's become a mean place since the pt-and-brie crowd started moving in from San Francisco, Ned said sullenly. So when you didn't dare take a sledgehammer to the second gnome, you were left with no choice but to pee on their windows. Exactly. But I didn't just go off half-cocked. I thought about the situation for a week. Then I hosed them. After which, Henry Friddle climbed on his roof with a full bladder, looking for justice. Yeah. But he waited till I had a birthday dinner for my mom. Unforgivable, Billy judged. Does the Mafia attack innocent members of a man's family? Ned asked indignantly. Although the question had been rhetorical, Billy played for his tip: No. The Mafia's got class. Which is a word these professor types can't even spell, Ned said. Mom was seventy-six. She could have had a heart attack. So, the tourist said, while trying to urinate on your dining-room windows, Friddle fell off his roof and broke his neck on the Ned Pearsall gnome. Pretty ironic. I don't know ironic, Ned replied. But it sure was sweet. Tell him what your mom said, Billy urged. Following a sip of beer, Ned obliged: My mom told me, Honey, praise the Lord, this proves there's a God. After taking a moment to absorb those words, the tourist said, She sounds like quite a religious woman. She wasn't always. But at seventy-two, she caught pneumonia....

From Publishers Weekly Starred . A diabolic killer plays a harrowing game of cat and mouse with a reclusive bartender in Koontz's latest gripping suspense thriller. Billy Wiles, a 30-something bartender and former writer, is content with his solitary Napa County existence listening to "beer-based psychoanalysis" from tavern regulars; visiting his hospitalized, comatose fiancée, Barbara; and carving wood sculptures. But the simple life gets mighty complicated when he finds a note with a deadly, time-sensitive ultimatum: he must choose between the death of a young schoolteacher or an elderly humanitarian in six hours. Reluctant local sheriff Lanny Olsen dismisses it as a joke until a comely teacher is found strangled and another threatening note appears offering even less time for Billy to decide the fate of two more people. Who would have guessed that one of those people would be Olsen? After his friend's murder, Billy finds that the cunning killer has gained access to every aspect of his life as the ultimatums grow increasingly more personal. Suppressing horrific childhood memories, Billy scrambles to bury grisly incriminating evidence the murderer has deviously planted. More gruesome deaths and shaky suspicions trap Billy right in the demented killer's lair for just the beginning of Koontz's serpentine showdown. Graphic, fast-paced action, well-developed characters and relentless, nail-biting scenes show Koontz at the top of his game. (May 24) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.