

# Scared to death

*Thriller authors prove tricks can be treats*

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*Suspended Sentences*

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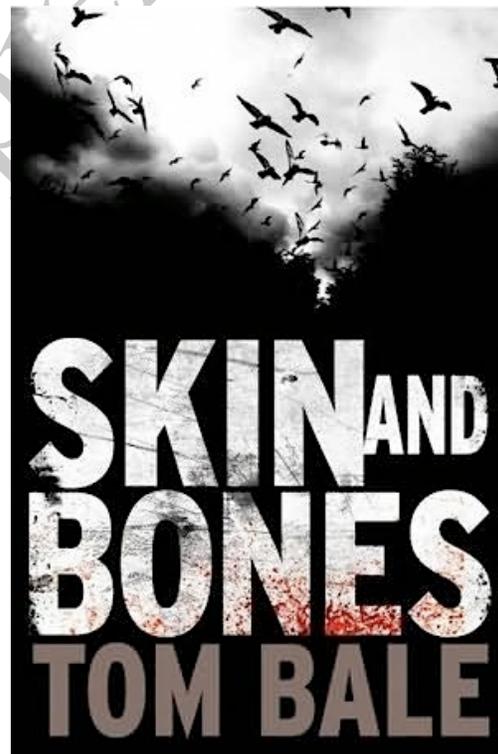
by Jim Napier

The 31st of October is but two days away, and candy is for kids. Essentially a pagan day, Halloween demands genuine, blood-curdling fear, the sort that wakes you in the middle of the night wondering whether there's a stranger in the house, and keeps you awake for hours, listening for unfamiliar sounds. That sort of primal terror is best achieved if you find yourself in an abandoned Victorian mansion, on a lonely road, on a stormy night; it's hard to replicate in a suburban split-level bathed in streetlamps, and surrounded by familiar faces.

Hard, but not impossible: a skilled wordsmith can turn a cozy night by the fire into a vision of Jack Nicholson splintering his way through a door with a fire-axe and a demoniacal grin. Here-with, a carefully-honed selection of tales designed to send shivers up your spine. But be warned: we're not in Kansas any more. There are no easy outs here – no aliens, werewolves, vampires or zombies that we can comfortably file under fantasy; just harrowing tales based on the premise that the familiar world can be every bit as frightening as anything we can imagine. The demons that live among us: just the thing after you've tucked the little ones in for the night. Happy reading...

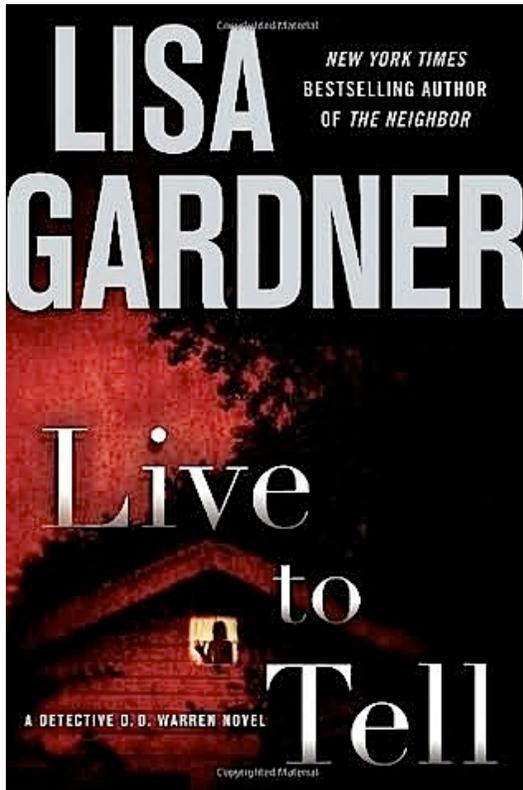
**Tom Bale, *Skin and Bones*  
(Preface Publishing, 2009)**

In a small village in Sussex on a cold January morning a young man goes on a killing spree, murdering everyone around him before turning a gun on himself. Horrifying, tragic, senseless – and all too familiar in today's world. As the community and the nation seek closure by characterizing the rampage as



a one-off by a deranged man, one survivor believes there was another killer involved. Working with the son of another victim, their efforts will lay bare a conspiracy of silence leading back to

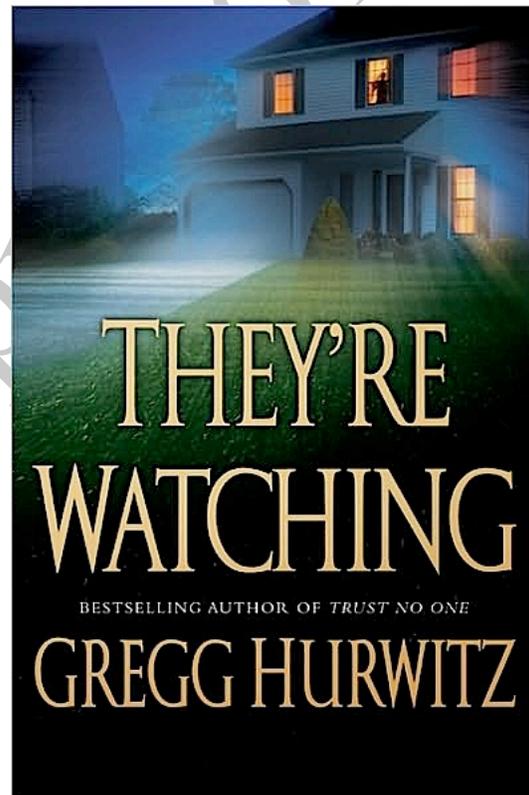
the past, and most disturbingly of all, suggest that the killings have not ended. A well-crafted debut by an impressive talent, *Skin and Bones* paints a disturbing picture of village life and suggests that the familiar figures who cross our paths daily may be harbouring secrets that can affect us all.



**Lisa Gardner, *Live to Tell*  
(Bantam Books, 2010)**

For those tranquil readers who may not have encountered her before, Lisa Gardner is the best-selling author of a dozen series tales, a couple of stand-alones, and an anthology of crime fiction stretching back over more than a decade. In *Live to Tell*, Boston police detective D. D. Warren pulls a truly horrifying case: four members of a working-class family have been brutally murdered at home, and the suspect, lying in a local hospital and clinging to life, is the father of the victims. As disturbing as the case

is, for a nurse working in a local pediatric psych ward it's even more troubling, as she fears that this is similar to a crime that targeted her own family nearly twenty-five years earlier, and that has gone unsolved. Add to the mix a woman who will do anything to protect her son, and you have a cautionary tale which suggests that home is not always where the heart is. An engrossing novel that unfolds from multiple points of view including the killer's, this will keep you riveted to your seat with the light on, until you turn the final page.



**Gregg Hurwitz,  
*They're Watching*  
(St. Martin's Press, 2010)**

Patrick Davis's carefully-planned, focused life is about to be turned upside down. Things are nicely falling into place for the teacher-turned-screenplay-writer, who has finally sold a script and is looking forward to being involved in

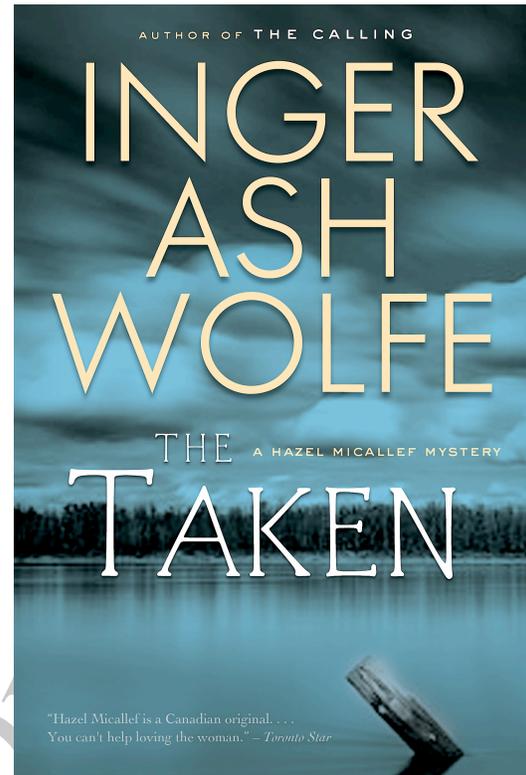
the movie, when he gets fired. Then one evening he finds a DVD slipped inside his newspaper. His curiosity aroused, he slips it into his videodisc player, and a chill goes through him as he recognises the window of his own downstairs bathroom. Other DVDs follow, each more invasive than the last. When he attempts to copy them onto his computer, they not only fail to copy, they erase themselves. And then a message: *Do what we say or she dies.*

The sixth and latest in a series of fast-paced standalone thrillers, what saves *They're Watching* from being just another formula action tale is crackling dialogue, black humour, and the basic believability of the main characters. With a strong visual element, I wouldn't be surprised to see *They're Watching* become a movie: a case of art imitating art.

**Inger Ash Wolfe, *The Taken*  
(McClelland & Stewart, 2009)**

Who is Inger Ash Wolfe? The pen name of a Canadian author who reputedly is a successful writer of Canadian literary fiction, one wonders about her (his?) motivation in adopting the pseudonym. Is it because, like other writers of 'serious' fiction she regards crime novels as inferior, and genuinely wants to mask her identity? Or perhaps it's merely a clever marketing ploy, designed to pique the public's interest? No matter, for Wolfe's novels stand on their own merits. Set in Port Dundas, Ontario, *The Taken* chronicles the exploits of Detective Inspector and acting police chief Hazel Micallef, who is popping painkillers as she recovers from back surgery, when a case comes along she can't ignore. A body has surfaced in a nearby lake, mirroring events in a story being serialized in the

local newspaper. The trail leads to a cold case, setting off a deadly cat-and-

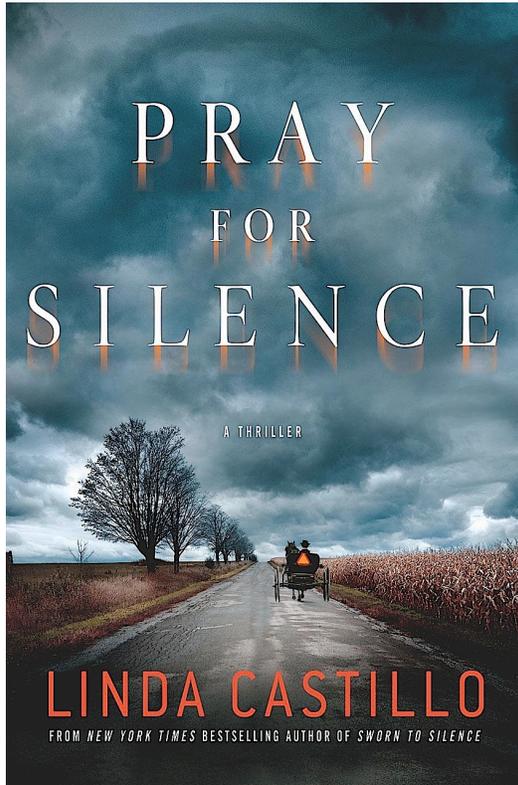


mouse game between the killer and the local police. Before it ends Micallef and DC James Wingate will strive to prevent another death. An evocative, layered thriller that does its author proud, and leaves readers wanting more. Who is this masked woman, anyway?

**Linda Castillo, *Pray for Silence*  
(Minotaur Books, 2010)**

You can run, but you can't hide. In a small Amish community in Pennsylvania an entire family is found slaughtered on their farm. Seven people, their lives brutally taken from them. Local police chief Kate Burkholder is in over her head, and even with the assistance of State Police officer John Tomasetti the case is baffling. The Amish are a people that keep to themselves and clues are hard to come by, a young girl's diary the

only evidence to hand. The second in the Kate Burkholder series, author Linda



Castillo uses multiple points of view to lend immediacy to a well-researched, gripping tale that skillfully explores the demons that live among (and sometimes within) us.

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