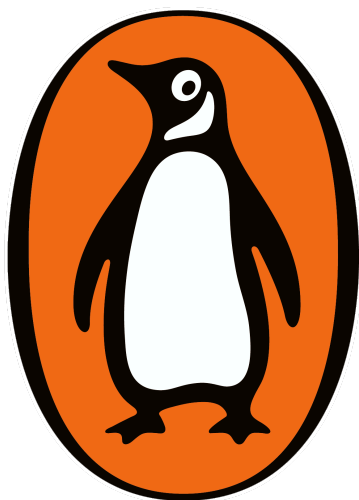


Howard  
Linskey

**DON'T  
LET  
HIM  
IN**

He's always been there.  
Now he's coming for you.





Howard Linskey

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DON'T LET HIM IN



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## About the Author

Howard Linskey is the author of a series of crime novels set in the north-east, featuring detective Ian Bradshaw and journalists Tom Carney and Helen Norton. Originally from Ferryhill in County Durham, Howard now lives in Hertfordshire with his wife and daughter.



*By the same author*

The Drop  
The Damage  
The Dead  
Hunting the Hangman  
Ungentlemanly Warfare  
No Name Lane  
Behind Dead Eyes  
The Search  
The Chosen Ones  
Alice Teale is Missing



*For Alison and Erin with love*

He has always been there.  
No one has ever seen him.  
Now he is watching you  
You're next.



*I'm watching you.*

*I've been doing it for a while now.*

*You're not big on security, are you? There's no lock on your back-garden gate. Just a latch. I tried it once during the daytime when there was no one around and it made a grating noise when two pieces of old metal scraped together, so I came back and oiled that for you. Now I can let myself in whenever I want without making a sound.*

*Your house is like most of the others in this town. Quite small and old, but the garden is perfect; it's long and not overlooked by any neighbours, providing you and me with all the privacy we need, and there's a tall fence at the back, with no other houses or flats behind it, just a hill. There are mature trees and bushes for me to stand behind. Perfect spots to observe you, unseen.*

*I could do without the wind chimes, though. Are you into all that feng shui nonsense or do you just like the sound they make? That metallic tinkling every time a breeze passes through them grates on me, and I have to make a real effort to blot it out but it's worth it for the view. I take a step back and look up to watch as the bathroom light goes on and I get a charge of excitement from this stolen moment of intimacy between us. You shed your clothes matter-of-factly, not realizing you have an audience and I catch a glimpse of the outline of your body as you step into the shower. I can't make out every detail through those frosted-glass windows but they are way less private than you imagine, particularly when it's dark out here and the light is on in your bathroom. You should really put a blind up.*

*I watch intently as you rub shampoo into your hair, then let the water rinse it away and I get an uninterrupted view of your body as you face the window. I can make out those darker patches on your chest and, too late, I realize that a higher vantage point would have allowed me to see everything. I will watch from the hill next time.*

*You take your time. Is this deliberate? Do you know I am here? That's not possible but I catch myself smiling at the notion. I know you're careless with the back door. You only lock it when you are on your way up to bed. It's probably unlocked now and I wonder what you would do if I came in? How would you feel if you stepped naked from the shower to find me standing there?*

*Would you scream?*

*Would your heart stop?*

*Would you want me?*

*I know it's been a while since you've been with a man. Maybe I'm exactly what you need.*

*But there's somewhere I have to be right now and it really cannot wait.*

*I'll be back soon, though.*

*I feel as if I truly know you now and I've made up my mind.*

*You're special.*

*You're the one.*

*You're next.*



## *Costa Rica*

The poor little sea turtles get confused. Newly hatched, they burst out of the sand, spot the man-made lights, then move inland towards them when they should be going out towards the sea, where they belong. This is fatal. They use up all their strength, while heading towards the mirage of the lights, thinking it's the ocean. When the sea turtles finally run out of steam, they find themselves close to a main road illuminated by street lamps, neon restaurant signs and gaudy bar fronts. Exhausted, they die in their hundreds, not even lasting a day.

If it wasn't for volunteers like Rebecca, none of them would make it. The sea turtles are cute little guys but they don't have a clue. On their own, they perish. And there were so many of them, pushing with their tiny legs as they traversed the beach, struggling for every inch of progress across the sand yet taking themselves further away from their true destination with every kick. That's when the volunteers stepped in. You had to pick them up, ever so gently, turn round and carry them back towards the sea.

It was a simple and rewarding task and Rebecca Cole was glad of it. She didn't want to think about anything else apart from rescuing the sea turtles before she moved on again – to another place, another country – until her mind had cleared. Life here had a pleasing simplicity. She was barefoot, dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, her hair sun-bleached from months travelling in far warmer climes than Britain. Rebecca carried the 'little dudes', as the Australian surfer guy next to her kept calling them, one at a time back across yards of white sandy beach, then lowered them gently just before the

shallows and watched with satisfaction as they first crawled then swam out to sea.

She waved at the latest one. ‘Good luck, mate,’ she told him. ‘I just saved your life. Don’t mention it,’ and the Aussie guy laughed at that. She turned and they locked eyes for a moment. He was cute and gave her the impression he liked what he’d seen and why not? Rebecca was tanned and had even lost weight from all the walking she had done on this trip. The Aussie guy had no idea how fucked up her life was, and Rebecca had no intention of enlightening him.

When guys asked her, she always gave them the same spiel about hitting her late twenties and wanting to quit the rat race for a while and kick back, resisting the temptation to add that she was trying to find herself, because as clichéd as it sounded, it was as authentic a description as any for her situation. In reality, she did feel lost.

Rebecca was in a mild enough mood for now, though, distracted by the sea turtles and their faulty internal satnavs, in no hurry to move on, taking each day at a time. She had barely thought about her own troubles today and that was unusual. Even when you supposedly left your worries thousands of miles behind you, you never did, not really. They stayed with you, like unwanted travel companions.

She felt lighter today than she had in a long time – but she should have known it wouldn’t last. It was Polly who came looking for her. She had befriended the other English girl on the bus from the airport, in that no-consequences way fellow travellers have of coming together on the road, before drifting apart later when they’ve moved on. It had been nice to have someone to walk around with, then drink and talk together till the early hours, before crashing at the hostel. But the look on Polly’s face provided few clues to the seriousness of the call Rebecca was about to take.

‘It’s your mum?’ She made it a question, as if she wasn’t sure that the woman on the other end of the line was actually telling the truth. ‘Calling from New Zealand?’ Again spoken as if she half expected Rebecca to answer, ‘Don’t be ridiculous.’

‘OK,’ was all she gave in reply, because Rebecca couldn’t be bothered to explain that her parents divorced years ago, and her mother was remarried and living in Auckland with her second husband. Rebecca walked unhurriedly across the sand at first, until she realized the call might be costing her mother more than a few dollars, so there could actually be a

serious reason for it. Also, she thought, why not just hang up when you learn I'm not there? Why wait on the line while someone goes down to the beach to find me?

The bloke on the reception desk pointed to the phone in the lobby, which was out of its cradle and lying on the table waiting for her. She took it and said, 'Mam?'

'Oh, Rebecca,' and that was all her mother managed before the tears came and Rebecca was left to repeatedly ask, 'What's happened? What's wrong? What's happened, Mam?' Her Northumbrian accent broadened when she was stressed and it was always *mam*, not mum.

'I'm sorry,' her mother said between sobs as she tried to compose herself, 'it's taken me ages to track you down.'

'I told you where I was staying,' Rebecca protested, and her exasperation came through. She was about to remind her mother of the detailed email, with all her ports of call listed in case of emergency, but before she could her mother finally took a deep breath and calmed down just enough to say, 'I'm sorry, Becky. It's your father.'

'Dad? What's wrong with Dad?'

'He's gone, darling. He's gone.'