



## ★ **The Bell in the Lake**

**Lars Mytting**

**Deborah Dawkin, Translator**

The Overlook Press (Sep 29, 2020)

Hardcover \$27.00 (400pp)

978-1-4197-4318-4

Its magic pure and its mysteries primordial, Lars Mytting's novel *The Bell in the Lake* is a tour de force set in the untamed wilds of Norway.

Fresh out of seminary, Kai Schweigaard receives an assignment to head a remote church in Butangen—the first humble step toward what's projected to be a celebrated career.

Opposite Kai is Astrid Hekne, who's regarded as "mulish and impossible to discipline" after refusing two village men. Her established family contributed bits and pieces to the aging stave church that Kai hopes to replace with a contemporary building: a mystical tapestry that's since gone missing; twin bells to memorialize two of its daughters, whose chimes are rumored to have prophetic powers.

Astrid argues with and challenges Kai, winning his admiration. She longs for the world that's represented by the newspapers that Kai shares with her, where the light of gas lamps reaches inward to illuminate minds.

When a German architect comes to the village to prepare the church for its deconstruction, he complicates Astrid and Kai's delicate balance. Gerhard's eye for wild beauty opens him to Astrid's graces, but the love that they ignite spurs Kai toward a vindictive act that's destined to reverberate through Butangen's generations.

Weaving beauty with brutality, and theological orthodoxy with gorgeous heterodoxy, the novel stakes its place where the modern and ancient worlds converge. Descriptions of the stave church's mythological, pre-Christian carvings ignite the imagination, while the austere realities of life in a rustic village, where the women give "birth without fuss and return ... to the milking shed with the afterbirth still steaming behind them," are relayed with sobering matter-of-factness.

Both heartbreaking and awe-inspiring, *The Bell in the Lake* is an unforgettable novel that celebrates untamed faith.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*