

★ **The Reindeer Hunters****Lars Mytting****Deborah Dawkin, Translator**

The Overlook Press (Nov 22, 2022)

Hardcover \$28.00 (448pp)

978-1-4197-5977-2

Lars Mytting's epic, enchanting historical novel *The Reindeer Hunters* ushers a remote Norwegian village into the modern age.

In the twenty years since Butangen's stave church was removed and Astrid Hekne died giving birth to twins, Pastor Kai Schweigaard has mellowed. Because his past rigidity had a high cost, he's more forgiving to his parishioners, some of whom still nurse ancient beliefs, than he once thought himself capable of. Indeed, the more they acquiesce to modern developments and doctrinal logic, the more he finds himself wishing that some of Butangen's "shadowy corners" had been preserved: "Memories, thoughts, quirky impulses ... had taken strange shapes and influenced the way people lived. Veins of silver and slag intersected with each other." In allegiance to Astrid, he still searches for the Hekne Weave, which is said to foretell the end of times.

As the found family around him grows, Kai also laments that his relationship with Astrid's son, Jehans, fell apart. Jehans—quiet, sturdy, and sharp—halted his education to eke out an existence on his foster parents' farm. He hunts reindeer each season, marveling at their dignity. In the course of these excursions, Jehans meets Victor, a visitor from England who's chasing a trophy—and vague family lore. Their instant connection bursts Butangen's secrets open once more.

In the background of the Hekne family's continuing tale is the march of history. Jehans marries a brilliant woman who helps him to bring electricity to the village's high, rocky farms; they open a dairy with modern accouterments. In a steady way, they meet old prejudices with fresh reason, upending centuries of inequalities. And as WWI and the Spanish flu force a final reckoning, the bell beneath the lake peals out—mournful, defiant, and eternal. In this spellbinding historical saga, love and lore have an alchemistic effect.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2022)

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