



Wolves at the Door

Gunnar Staalesen

Don Bartlett, Translator

Orenda Books (Jan 1, 2020)

Softcover \$15.95 (276pp)

978-1-912374-41-0

Gunnar Staalesen's *Wolves at the Door* is a chilling thriller made engrossing thanks to the sarcastic sallying and social conscience of its lead detective.

Falsely accused of having child pornography on his computer, private investigator Varg Veum now finds himself a target. On the streets of Bergen, Norway, a car almost kills him. This happens in the opening pages of the book, and Veum intuits that the attempt on his life is connected to the crime.

Three other suspects were charged in the same case, but only Veum was found innocent. When the other suspects are murdered, Veum decides to investigate, led by his strong sense of justice and his tendency toward philosophical musings.

As he seeks out the murderer, Veum relies on help from Catherine, a coworker from his social work days; Svend, a lawyer; Ghulam, a neighbor of one of the victim's children; and Solvie, his love interest. These characters are developed in a gradual and engrossing way that complements the complicated plot.

Within the taut narrative, characters provide Veum with astute observations and clear logic. Their motivations and lies thrust the story forward. Settings and people are described with flair, drawing distinctions of class and generation as the city's seedier elements are revealed with eerie details.

Veum proves to be a private investigator of high caliber. He is idealistic, troubled, and scruffy, and he has a healthy scrim of pessimism. His inner struggles and self-reflection help to balance the story. Veum's disappointment over his nation's social failings deepens, and with each chapter, the investigation becomes deeper and murkier, too.

Veum's inner life and the bold subject matter make *Wolves at the Door* an excellent noir thriller.

MONICA CARTER (January / February 2020)

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