

THE HUMMINGBIRD (ANNA FEKETE) BY KATI HIEKKAPELTO



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Heikkapelto's brooding debut, a large-scale police procedural set in a small Finnish town. . . Promises tough and powerful crime fiction to come. --Publishers Weekly

A beautifully written and many-layered mystery novel that illuminates the dangers of prejudice, while still providing a major thrill ride. --Mystery Scene Magazine

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Anna Fekete, who fled the Yugoslavian wars as a child, starts working as a criminal investigator in a northern Finnish coastal town, with her new partner, Esko, who doesn't bother hiding his racist prejudices. Anna's work as a criminal investigator barely gets off the ground before she is thrust into a high-profile, seemingly unsolvable case that has riveted the nation. A young woman has been killed on a running trail, and a pendant depicting an Aztec god has been found in her possession. Another murder soon follows. All signs point to a serial killer, but can Anna catch the Hummingbird before he - or she - strikes again? Kati Hiekkapelto is a special needs teacher by training. She lives on an old farm on the island of Hailuoto in Northern Finland. This is her first novel. Translated from the Finnish by David Hackston.

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"Wicked people are full of darkness."

By Fairbanks Reader - Bonnie Brody

Anna Fekete is a new hire in the Finnish police department's Violent Crime Unit. She is originally from Hungary and is a survivor of the Serbo-Croatian war. She immigrated to Finland with her mother and brother when she was a child. She speaks fluent Finnish and English, along with several other languages. This book begins as she starts her job in the violent crime unit and is partnered up with Esko, a racist, prejudiced drunk. She questions if she can bear spending time with this taciturn, unpleasant man who does not speak to her and covers the alcohol on his breath with mints.

Shortly after she begins her job, a jogger is murdered by a shotgun blast to the head. This murder is followed

by two others and the police are now seeking a serial killer, a rarity in Finland. Anna is a great cop but she has a tendency towards depression and insomnia. She once served in the Finnish army and was a good jogger but lately she spends her time channel surfing and smoking cigarettes. She has a brother named Akos who she has not seen in several years. He is an alcoholic and addict and she decides to make contact with him which causes her more problems.

There are no real leads on the case except that a small necklace is left in the pocket of each victim. The necklace is an Aztec symbol for a powerful and wrathful god. The only other connection between the victims is that they are killed while they are out for a run in the evening.

Anna is also intrigued by another case, that of a Kurdish high school student who has called the police emergency number asking for help. When the call is responded to, the girl says that she dialed the number by mistake. Anna doesn't believe her and thinks that the girl is in danger. She decides, on her own, to watch the family and to see what is going on. She knows that some Kurdish families believe in honor killings and isolating their female children until marriage and Anna is suspicious that this might be going on here.

The characters are well-developed, which is one of the real strengths of this book. I felt like I got to know a lot about Anna and Esko as I got deeper into the novel. The book is a real page-turner and a good thriller. My only problem with it is that the climax about the serial killer occurs at the very end and seems implausible. The situation with the Kurdish girl is resolved wonderfully and added a lot to my enjoyment of the book. I think that some of the translation is a bit awkward but most of the book reads very smoothly. It is a thriller that I'd recommend to readers who enjoy Scandinavian noir.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

The Hummingbird piqued my interest on page one but didn't deliver on that initial promise.

By Texasbooklover

The Hummingbird by Kati Hiekkapelto

Translated from the Finnish by David Hackston

Arcadia Books

978-1-909807-56-3

\$21, 363 pgs

The Hummingbird is Finnish writer Kati Hiekkapelto's debut novel, an entrant in the Scandinavian crime fiction genre which is so hot right now. Anna Fekete is a Hungarian immigrant to Finland and a brand new detective in the violent crimes unit. On her first day at her new job, a body is found on a jogging path, dead of a gunshot wound, with a strange medallion found in the pocket of her jacket. Before long another body is found on another jogging path, dead of a gunshot wound with the identical medallion in his pocket, and the hunt is on for a serial killer.

The Hummingbird piqued my interest on page one but didn't deliver on that initial promise. Anna is a likable and complex character but I grew weary of reading about how tired she was. She's stressed and homesick and depressed – I get it - but it made me tired. On the other hand, depression is monotonous so maybe it's Hiekkapelto's way of viscerally conveying Anna's precarious state of mind. If the latter is the case then she succeeded. The details about the private lives of her colleagues proved superfluous to the story. Inserted at odd points, making for abrupt and clumsy segues, these details merely served to interrupt the flow of the narrative. Anna's partner Esko, the one colleague that we need to know more about, isn't given a back story at all and no details of his life outside the office are offered. This is unfortunate because their relationship is important and the evolution of that relationship develops in such a way that I was curious and wished I'd known more about him. The identity of the killer is a surprise, as it should be, but it is such a surprise

because there are negligible clues to entice the reader, lead you on and reward your perseverance. The reader is denied that satisfaction and has no opportunities to grin and think, "Aha! That's a clue." We like to congratulate ourselves on our sleuthing abilities - this genre should be interactive. In addition, when the antagonist is revealed there is no back story and little to no explanation offered as to homicidal motivation. Serial killers do not kill randomly. This genre demands psychology. Otherwise the author seems to be offering up a killer at random.

Serial killers are well- and oft-trod ground and there needs to be an element that sets a story apart from so many others. In this case that element is immigration. Hiekkapelto is at her best when channeling the immigrant experience. "Anna...also knew from experience that it would be futile talking to Esko [her partner] and people like him about despair, fear, war, torture, oppression, discrimination, poverty and hunger, about how the world was full of people whose lives were a daily struggle against all of those terrible things." The author's empathy and understanding are affecting and I was truly moved. There is a subplot involving a young, Muslim immigrant girl and a case of suspected honor violence. She calls the Finnish equivalent of 911 to claim that her life is in danger. When the other detectives seemingly dismiss the case, Anna - having once been a young, Muslim immigrant girl - appoints herself the girl's personal protector. This subplot meshes well with the main narrative, plays to Anna's strengths, and the resolution is a pleasant surprise.

Hiekkapelto is also gifted at descriptive passages. Her characters are diverse and well-delineated. I could picture them in my mind's eye as individuals. Her descriptive talent also applies to land- and cityscapes. A description of the ghetto new immigrants are consigned to: "The whole place was a forest built of dirty concrete, a thicket of trees as far as the eye could see, a place with trolls grunting on the pathways and creatures lurking in the corners, a place where the glimmer of a fairy tale shone only in the glazed eyes of the drug addicts." And this: "Kids in baggy jeans were smoking something beneath the roof outside Bihar's doorway, their presence challenging the shadows cast upon them like a life sentence by the surrounding buildings. Ducks caught in the oil, birds that nobody dressed in overalls is going to come and save."

In stark contrast, this is the Finnish coastal forest in autumn: "When Anna had walked just over a kilometer, the path swung very close to the shoreline. The rush of iron-grey waves across the autumnal sea could be heard clearly. Anna looked out towards the sea. The wind whipped water into her eyes. If there had been flocks of sheep to clear the shrubs, as there had been centuries ago, she would have been able to see the shore, she thought. A white seagull braved the chilled air. Anna wondered how long it was planning on staying so far north. She gathered a handful of lingonberries and tasted the sweetness brought to them by the hoar frosts."

As a debut, *The Hummingbird* is an acceptable first effort. In my opinion the problem has more to do with editing than with the concept, story or characters. There are a lot of adverbs and rarely did anyone just "say" anything; they screamed, cried, conferred, threatened, resolved, quipped, shrieked, exclaimed, cursed, bellowed, shouted and instructed. They even bleated. It seemed as if someone got carried away with a thesaurus. This is the sort of thing an editor is supposed to prevent. See Stephen King's *On Writing* for the best advice I've ever come across on this subject. There's even a point where the third person narrative briefly jumps to first person before being yanked back into line. In sum, *The Hummingbird* was uneven. That said, there are complete characters, flashes of humor, evocative description and observant social commentary. A sequel is in the pipeline and there's enough promise in this debut that I want to read the next installment before I make up my mind about Hiekkapelto. With practice and skillful editing she could be great. Stay tuned.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Engaging

By Rex McLean

I read a lot of Scandinavian crime novels. This was pretty good. Ending was odd but most of these type of books are. I read them mostly because of what is revealed about cultures and this was fun in that regard. Lots of Hungarian vulgar expressions that I shared with my Hungarian wife.

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