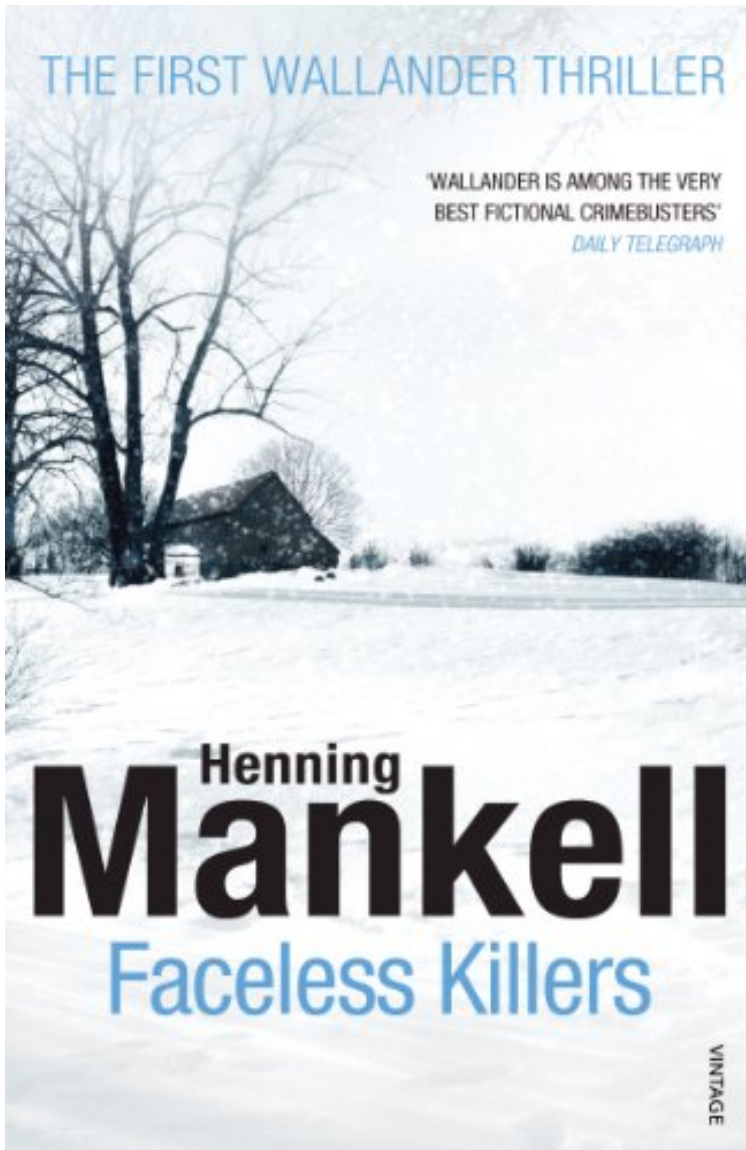


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Faceless Killers: Kurt Wallander



Par Henning Mankell
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOne frozen January morning at 5am, Inspector Wallander responds to what he believes is a routine call out. When he reaches the isolated farmhouse he discovers a bloodbath. An old man has been tortured and beaten to death, his wife lies barely alive beside his shattered body, both victims of a violence beyond reason. The woman supplies Wallander with his only clue: the perpetrators may have been foreign. When this is leaked to the press, it unleashes a tide of racism.Wallander's life is a shambles. His wife has left him, his daughter refuses to speak to him, and even his ageing father barely tolerates him. He works tirelessly, eats badly, and drinks his nights away. But now Wallander must forget his troubles and throw himself into a battle against time and against mounting racial hatred.Winner of the CWA Gold Dagger for

Sidetracked..com If you remember with pleasure those dark and gloomy Martin Beck mysteries by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo, you'll be glad to plunge into the first of Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallender mysteries to appear in English. Wallender's personal life can occasionally seem more depressing than even a provincial Swedish detective should be asked to bear, but his investigative skills are strictly first rate. And Mankell's story of the brutal murder of an elderly farm couple uncovers an unusual aspect of life in modern Sweden--a streak of fear and prejudice against the many newcomers from Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe who have sought asylum there.

Chapter 1 He has forgotten something, he knows that for sure when he wakes up. Something he dreamt during the night. Something he ought to remember. He tries to remember. But sleep is like a black hole. A well that reveals nothing of its contents. At least I didn't dream about the bulls, he thinks. Then I would have been hot and sweaty, as if I had suffered through a fever during the night. This time the bulls left me in peace. He lies still in the darkness and listens. His wife's breathing at his side is so faint that he can scarcely hear it. One of these mornings she'll be lying dead beside me and I won't even notice, he thinks. Or maybe it'll be me. Daybreak will reveal that one of us has been left all alone. He checks the clock on the table next to the bed. The hands glow and register 4:45 a.m. Why did I wake up? he asks himself. Usually I sleep till 5:30. I've done that for more than forty years. Why did I wake now? He listens to the darkness and suddenly he is wide-awake. Something is different. Something has changed. He stretches out one hand tentatively until he touches his wife's face. With his fingertips he can feel that she's warm. So she's not dead. Neither of them has been left alone yet. He listens intently to the darkness. The horse, he thinks. She's not neighing. That's why I woke up. Normally the mare whinnies at night. I hear it without waking up, and in my subconscious I know that I can keep on sleeping. Carefully he gets up from the creaky bed. For forty years they've owned it. It was the only piece of furniture they bought when they got married. It's also the only bed they'll ever have. He can feel his left knee aching as he crosses the wooden floor to the window. I'm old, he thinks. Old and worn out. Every morning when I wake up I'm surprised all over again that I'm seventy years old. He looks out into the winter night. It's January 7, 1990, and no snow has fallen in Skne this winter. The lamp outside the kitchen door casts its glow across the yard, the bare chestnut tree, and the fields beyond. He squints towards the neighbouring farm where the Lvgrens live. The long, low, white house is dark. The stable in the corner against the farmhouse has a pale yellow lamp above its black door. That's where the mare stands in her stall, and that's where she whinnies uneasily at night when something disturbs her. He listens to the darkness. The bed creaks behind him. What are you doing? mutters his wife. Go back to sleep, he replies. I'm just stretching my legs. Is your knee hurting again? No. Then come back to bed. Don't stand there freezing, you'll catch cold. He hears her turn over onto her side. Once we loved each other, he thinks. But he shields himself from his own thought. That's too noble a word. Love. It's not for the likes of us. Someone who has been a farmer for more than forty years, who has worked every day bowed over the heavy Scanian clay, does not use the word love when he talks about his wife. In our lives, love has always been something totally different. He looks at the neighbour's house, peering, trying to penetrate the darkness of the winter night. Whinny, he thinks. Whinny in your stall so I know that everything's all right. So I can lie down under the quilt for a little while longer. A retired, crippled farmer's day is long and dreary enough as it is. He realises that he's looking at the kitchen window of the neighbour's house. All these years he has cast an occasional glance at his neighbour's window. Now something looks different. Or is it just the darkness that's confusing him? He blinks and counts to twenty to rest his eyes. Then he looks at the window again, and now he's sure that it's open. A window that has always been closed at night is open. And the mare hasn't whinnied at all. The mare hasn't whinnied because Lvgren hasn't taken his usual nightly walk to the stable when his prostate acts up and drives him out of his warm bed. I'm just imagining things, he says to himself. My eyes are cloudy. Everything is as it always is. After all, what could happen here? In the village of Lunnarp, just north of Kade Lake, on the way to beautiful Krageholm Lake, right in the heart of Skne? Nothing ever happens here. Time stands still in this village where life flows along like a creek without vigour or intent. The only people who live here are a few old farmers who have sold or leased out their land to someone else. We live here and wait for the inevitable. He looks at the kitchen window once more, and thinks that neither Maria nor Johannes Lvgren would fail to close it. With age comes a sense of dread; there are more and more locks, and -no one forgets to close a window before nightfall. To grow old is to live in fear. The dread of something menacing that you felt when you were a child returns when you get old. I could get dressed and go out, he thinks. Hobble through the yard with the winter wind in my face, up to the fence that separates our properties. I could see close to that I'm just imagining things. But he doesn't move. Soon Johannes will be getting out of bed to make coffee. First he'll turn on the light in the bathroom, then the light

in the kitchen. Everything will be the way it always is. He stands by the window and realises that hes freezing. He thinks about Maria and Johannes. Weve had a marriage with them too, he thinks, as neighbours and as farmers. Weve helped each other, shared the hardships and the bad years. But weve shared the good times too. Together weve celebrated Midsummer and eaten Christmas dinner. Our children ran back and forth between the two farms as if they belonged to both. And now were sharing the -long--drawn--out years of old age. Without knowing why, he opens the window, carefully so as not to wake Hanna. He holds on tight to the latch so that the gusty winter wind wont tear it out of his hand. But the night is completely calm, and he recalls that the weather report on the radio had said nothing about a storm approaching over the Scanian plain. The starry sky is clear, and it is very cold. He is just about to close the window again when he thinks he hears a sound. He listens and turns, with his left ear towards the open window. His good ear, not his right that was damaged by all the time he spent cooped up in stuffy, rumbling tractors. A bird, he thinks.

A night bird calling. Suddenly he is afraid. Out of nowhere fear appears and seizes him. It sounds like somebody shouting. In despair, trying to be heard. A voice that knows it has to penetrate thick stone walls to catch the attention of the neighbours. Im imagining things, he thinks. Theres nobody shouting. Who would it be? He shuts the window so hard that it makes a flowerpot jump, and Hanna wakes up. What are you doing? she says, and he can hear that shes annoyed. As he replies, he feels sure. The terror is real. The mare isnt whinnying, he says, sitting down on the edge of the bed. And the Lvgrens kitchen window is wide open. And someone is shouting. She sits up in bed. What did you say? He doesnt want to answer, but now hes sure that it wasnt a bird that he heard. Its Johannes or Maria, he says. One of them is calling for help. She gets out of bed and goes over to the window. Big and wide, she stands there in her white nightgown and looks out into the dark. The kitchen window isnt open, she whispers. Its smashed. He goes over to her, and now hes so cold that hes shaking. Theres someone shouting for help, she says, and her voice quavers. What should we do? Go over there, she replies. Hurry up! But what if its dangerous? Arent we going to help our best friends? He dresses quickly, takes the torch from the kitchen cupboard next to the corks and coffee cans. Outside, the clay is frozen under his feet. When he turns around he catches a glimpse of Hanna in the window. At the fence he stops. Everything is quiet. Now he can see that the kitchen window is broken. Cautiously he climbs over the low fence and approaches the white house. But no voice calls to him. I am just imagining things, he thinks. Im an old man who cant figure out whats really happening anymore. Maybe I did dream about the bulls last night. The bulls that I would dream were charging towards me when I was a boy, making me realise that someday I would die. Then he hears the cry. Its weak, more like a moan. Its Maria. He goes over to the bedroom window and peeks cautiously through the gap between the curtain and the window frame.

Suddenly he knows that Johannes is dead. He shines his torch inside and blinks hard before he forces himself to look. Maria is crumpled up on the floor, tied to a chair. Her face is bloody and her false teeth lie broken on her spattered nightgown. All he can see of Johannes is a foot. The rest of his body is hidden by the curtain. He limps back and climbs over the fence again. His knee aches as he stumbles desperately across the frozen clay. First he calls the police. Then he takes his crowbar from a closet that smells of mothballs. Wait here, he tells Hanna. You dont need to see this. What happened? she asks with tears of fright in her eyes. I dont know, he says. But I woke up because the mare wasnt neighing in the night. I know that for sure. It is

January 7, 1990. Not yet dawn.