

The blurred line between concern and evil

Hans Gunnarsson's skilfully written dialogue between a man and a woman on a journey oscillates alarmingly between the explicit and the merely implied. You won't be able to put *Room for Rent* down, Magnus Persson writes.

Room for Rent

Author: Hans Gunnarsson

Genre: Prose

Publisher: Albert Bonniers Förlag

The nexus of Hans Gunnarsson's new novel *Room for Rent* is crafted from a set of familiar motifs. A young couple, Tilde and Josef, are driving south through Sweden with their infant son. The goal of the journey is to meet Tilde's birth mother, who runs a less than successful B&B in a rural backwater along with her grown-up, deeply troubled son. For the reader, but only for the reader, associations with Hitchcock's *Psycho* soon become unavoidable. Be that as it may, a night's accommodation has been booked. Josef is sceptical, despite or precisely because he, too, is adopted. Tilde's mother is unaware of the imminent reunion. We journey through small towns and farmland, populated by oddballs, true originals and perfectly ordinary people – but as is so often the case in Gunnarsson's writings, the boundaries between such simple categories are quickly blurred. However, in his new novel, the author has chosen to home in on the existential drama in a way that signals a new direction. Gone, though not entirely, is his distinctive and finely-calibrated blend of psychological realism, black humour and subtle grotesquery. What remains is a classic tragedy; the reader soon apprehends that there can be no happy ending to this story.

The seemingly tedious, eventless drive to the B&B is nail-biter in itself. The dialogue between the man and the woman, the vacillation between the explicit and the merely implied, both of which come across as alarming, is exceedingly skilfully wrought. And yet it is only a mild foreshadowing of what will be revealed and come to pass once the family arrives at their destination. None of which can be revealed here, of course; suffice it to say that this is a book you won't be able to put down.

Svenska Dagbladet, Magnus Persson, 31 August 2016