

The Farm

Tom Rob Smith

The author's first stand-alone novel after his wildly successful Soviet-era trilogy (*Child 44*; *The Secret Speech*; *Agent 6*) hits the ground running. While living in the London flat of his partner, Daniel receives an urgent phone call from his father in Sweden. His mother, Tilde, has been committed to an asylum, believing she is the target of a local conspiracy. No sooner does Daniel get to the airport than his phone rings again: "Everything that man has told you is a lie," Tilde says. "I'm about to board a flight to London." A shocked Daniel spends the rest of the novel listening, as his paranoid mother methodically unspools a story about an elaborate plot set in the Swedish wilderness, which includes an officious neighbor, a missing girl, and a buried secret from Tilde's past. Daniel, like us, can barely believe what he's hearing, but soon gets wrapped up in the mystery himself. VERDICT The unreliability of Tilde's narration — is she telling the truth about this sinister scheme or is she crazy? — provides the novel with a constant tension, but her deliberate and frustrating withholding of information also keeps it from truly taking off. Still, this is a worthy addition to the growing canon of Scandinavian crime thrillers that also includes Stieg Larsson and Jo Nesbø. [Smith's mother is Swedish.—Ed.]

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