

One Step Behind

- 1 In a 2003 interview in *The Observer*, Henning Mankell says about *One Step Behind*: “Whatever I write, I have to begin with a question, something I don’t know the answer to. Here, it is: what happens to people when they’re thrown out on to the margins of society, who realize every day that they aren’t needed? . . . Then the story comes.” How does this story both pose and attempt to answer this question in regard to both murder victims and murderer? If you were to ask this same question each day as you read through your local newspaper, how do you think your answer would compare with the answers in *One Step Behind*?
- 2 When Wallander is forced to contemplate his own mortality in the face of his colleague Svedberg’s murder, he asks himself: “What if I die as suddenly as Svedberg? Who will miss me? What will people say? That I was a good policeman? But who will miss me as a person?” Answer Wallander’s questions. Consider Wallander’s colleagues in the police force and his relationships outside of work. Who do you think would miss Wallander? Would he be mourned “as a person” or because of his skills as a detective? How are his personal and professional lives intertwined?
- 3 “Why am I behaving as if it were something shameful?” Wallander asks himself about why he hid his diabetes diagnosis from his daughter, Linda. Why do you think Wallander wants to conceal the diagnosis? Why do you think he doesn’t take better care of himself before or after the diagnosis? Do you recognize this kind of self-neglect when it comes to health issues in yourself or someone you care about? Why is it so difficult to make lifestyle changes?
- 4 The teenagers in this novel cause Wallander to muse that it is “as if a whole generation has been abandoned by their parents.” How does Mankell shape the plot of *One Step Behind* to support Wallander’s observation? How would you describe Wallander’s role as a parent to Linda in this film, even if he confesses he was a “crap dad” during her younger years? Do you agree that the crimes perpetrated by young people in the novel are a result of their parents’ neglect? How much responsibility do you think young people should take for their own actions?
- 5 Throughout the investigation into Svedberg’s murder, Wallander is taken aback by the various comments that Svedberg considered Wallander his “best friend.” (“He said you were a man he could trust his life to,” Svedberg’s cousin says.) What does Wallander’s surprise at this revelation say about him, about Svedberg, and about modern society? How do the motifs of secrets and costume wearing in this story heighten the notion

that none of us truly “know” one another? What role do Wallander’s colleagues in the police department play in his life? Do you think they know each other in a meaningful way? What is ironic about the fact that the film both begins and ends with a collegial invitation to “get drinks” outside of work? How well do you think you know the people you interact with every day?

- 6 One critic noted that, with the use of the new “Red One” camera technology, Sweden “appears, by turn, dreamy, hostile, raw and claustrophobic, despite the small screen”—a description that applies perfectly to the plot of *One Step Behind*. What aspects of the story are filmed to appear “dreamy”? Which ones elicit a sense of hostility or rawness? When and how does the camerawork make the viewer feel especially “claustrophobic”? How does the contrast between “dreamy” and “raw and hostile” work especially well for a film about the uncovering of secrets and disguises?

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