



The Calling

Inger Ash Wolfe

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There were thirteen crime-scene pictures. Dead faces set in grimaces and shouts. Faces howling, whistling, moaning, crying, hissing. Hazel pinned them to the wall and stood back. It was a silent opera of ghosts.

Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef has lived all her days in the small town of Port Dundas and is now making her way toward retirement with something less than grace. Hobbled by a bad back and a dependence on painkillers, and feeling blindsided by divorce after nearly four decades of marriage, sixty-one-year-old Hazel has only the constructive criticism of her old goat of a mother and her own sharp tongue to buoy her. But when a terminally ill Port Dundas woman is gruesomely murdered in her own home, Hazel and her understaffed department must spring to life. And as one terminally ill victim after another is found—their bodies drained of blood, their mouths sculpted into strange shapes—Hazel finds herself tracking a truly terrifying serial killer across the country while everything she was barely holding together begins to spin out of control.

Through the cacophony of her bickering staff, her unsupportive superiors, a clamoring press, the town's rumor mill, and her own nagging doubts, Hazel can sense the dead trying to call out. But what secret do they have to share? And will she hear it before it's too late?

In *The Calling*, Inger Ash Wolfe brings a compelling new voice and an irresistible new heroine to the mystery world.

The Calling Details

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From Reader Review The Calling for online ebook

Wendy says

I am not quite half way through this and it is amazing! If you like Cody McFadyen then this book is perfect for you!

Finished it and loved it!

Lobstergirl says

Inger Ash Wolfe is the pseudonym for "a North American literary novelist," so I was curious to see a (presumably) skilled novelist put his or her genre instincts to work. It was a disappointment.

There were way too many characters and names introduced at the outset. By page 23, 23 characters had either been met in person, or mentioned (including two named Gord); some of those mentioned would later appear, others didn't. By the end of the book, this number had more than doubled. All the expected police department cliches were present: the main investigating detective is always going off the reservation, superiors are disliked, superiors refuse to allocate additional needed resources, there is bickering and discontent among the two lead detectives, guns get confiscated. There were elements of some Latinate (but new, cultish, and utterly wacked-out) religion that seemed to be attempting to replicate the mystique of other Church-related murder mysteries from authors like Umberto Eco and Dan Brown, rather unsuccessfully. I understand how some of these cultish beliefs relate to the murders, but remain confused on others.

We know who the killer is from page 1. The only mystery is motive and how it will all unravel. There is ambiguity; are these mercy killings, or murders? There is the unique aspect of a killer who smells like Juicy Fruit from his body producing ketones as he starves (yet still has the strength to carry out some awfully athletic murders), and the novelty of a detective-heroine who is 61 years old, virtually alcoholic, and in near constant back pain.

William says

The hardest part of writing a mystery for North American audiences has got to be getting the ending right. Because in American mysteries, the whole affair travels the arc from procedural to personal, concluding with the inevitable – and once upon a time, appreciated – face-to-face confrontation between law and disorder. It's a formula that becomes more tiresome the more the genre adheres to it, and only Europe has truly embraced tossing a little mystery back into the business of, um, mysteries again (Thank you, Karin Fossum).

To little surprise, this formula turns out to be the worst part of *The Calling*, which is otherwise, a tightly plotted, gruesome, outstandingly populated, and very well written police novel. The deep rural Ontario setting is brilliant, and each member of the quickly established cast of soon-to-be-regulars is unique and original, at least for the genre. If you like anything about procedurals, you'll love this novel. Even the treads it sets on the freeway of familiar ideas is done better than I'd hoped, finding at least small measures of originality in one of the game's oldest set-ups.

Outside the book itself, there's also a lot of speculation about who the author, Inger Ash Wolfe, might actually be. I'm less interested in that, so long as the novels keep coming. This is not just a promising

beginning; it's a chance to push the boundaries of the form into a mindset that lets a mystery be something more.

Lynn says

This book had almost everything I love in a book. It has fleshed out characters who I ended up caring about. It was beautifully written. It had a real sense of place. What I didn't care for was the graphic and gruesome descriptions of the aftermath of the killings. Also, the ending I thought was convenient.

I would like to read more about Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef who is a great character but will look at reviews for the next book to see if I can tell if the gore level is lower.

Trisha says

I finished this last night and I must admit it turned out better than I'd been thinking it would. Probably about two thirds of the way through, I was pretty much convinced that it was going to be a let down. But it did pick up in the dramatics later on, so that's good.

I really enjoyed reading about Hazel Micallef, Detective Inspector in a small town called Port Dundas. She wasn't perfect, not by a long shot, and I like that she made the sort of mistakes one can totally see a small town cop with no experience with mass murderers making. The book was full of colourful characters, and I like the "family" feel that the cops had with each other.

It was good in a way that there was no make-up scene with Greene, because it's less realistic if you have all the ends tied up, and everything working out nicely. Up until very near the end I wasn't sure how things would end, so I guess I was kept in suspense.

I am only giving it three stars because I didn't find it really gripping and I wasn't reading compulsively. But I did enjoy the read.

Karen says

THE CALLING is one of those books. One of those books that I found sometimes utterly compelling; was bored witless in some passages; laughed out loud in others; found myself heartily confused about some of the procedural elements; and was slightly repelled by some parts.

It is a serial killer book, and I will admit that I'm getting to the point where I'm over the whole serial killer thing. I'm particularly over the barking mad, out there motive serial killer thing. And there's certainly a barking mad impetus behind the killer in THE CALLING. Luckily, the plot is a little intriguing and how on earth he's managed to select and convince his victims to co-operate (up to a point) did mitigate the predictable elements somewhat.

DI Hazel Micallef is a great character - fiesty, compassionate, very realistic. The fallout from her divorce wasn't over-blown and she's certainly somebody that you can "get a handle on", empathise with. At points she was flat out funny. The relationship with her mother is hugely enjoyable.

There is a great sense of small town Canada throughout the book - albeit not the main point of the plots or the book as a whole, but there were nice little glimpses into life in Port Dundas, and the relationship between the small towns and the larger metropolitan areas.

The violence implicit in the killings was well handled - most of the very worst off camera, enough of the icky to the forefront to enhance our killer's extremely creepy persona. (Mind you, once in a while a serial killer that wasn't just weird would probably be a lot more chilling.)

The oddity that kept wrong-footing me at points though was a procedural element (and it's probably my fault) but I couldn't quite believe that a multi-location serial killer, ranging across the entire of a country like Canada would remain a small-town extremely local investigation with Hazel directing activities in far-flung locations. It might well happen that way - THE CALLING didn't quite convince me of the authenticity of this approach.

But as serial killer books goes, THE CALLING was okay - it's not the best crime book I've read in a long while, but it's certainly not the worst, and I'd recommend anyone looking for a strong female character, who can handle a bit of creepy and a bit of gore to try it out.

POSTSCRIPT: Inger Ash Wolfe is flagged as a pseudonym for a prominent North American literary novelist. I don't know why people play these games, but knowing / not knowing who the author is doesn't affect how the book reads, and besides, I didn't think the book was so bad that the author needs to hide their identity.

Ellen says

The Calling by Inger Ash Wolfe.

I had read and enjoyed The Night Bell by I.A.W. and decided to go back and start with the first book in the Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef series.

Hazel Micallef is not your average Detective Inspector. She's over 60 years of age with painful health issues and an aging mother she cares for at home. Detective Micallef is also divorce with a history of alcoholism which has never completely left her life. All that taken into consideration she runs a tight ship with a team that respects and has her back.

The murders began with a woman who Hazel knew as did her mother. This was the first and not to be the last. These victims had something in common. Their murderer was allowed entry into their homes. There were no signs of defensive wounds but there was something else. Something so strange that it went over everyone's head until the murderers code began to unravel.

Inger Ash Wolfe does something few other authors are capable of. He has the talent to write even the most heinous crimes/murders that have a hidden mystery within them. It's not horror for horror's sake ...it's so much more and then lends itself to depth of each and every characters including the victim(s). Highly recommended and hard to put down once started.

Mascanlon says

Wow! The most compelling book I've read in a long time. The characters have lots of depth and the plotting is twisty, sharp and very, very creepy. Not at all the mid of book I usually enjoy. It was recommended on a mystery book list I read so I took a chance and was rewarded. Set in Northern Canada, the female lead is 61, divorced and troubled by the very bad back and lack of support from regional headquarters. Enter what turns out to be a very scary serial killer who comes only by appointment. The procedural elements of the story are interesting and build suspense in the way the investigation identifies and tracks the killer.

The jacket blurbs promise a book that keeps you up at night to finish and that was true. I read this book in one sitting!

Jaksen says

Excellent mystery about a 60-year old female CO in a small Canadian town outside of Toronto. There are the usual issues with superiors, staff, new detective, etc., etc., but the slant's a little different and I liked the fact that the MC was an 'older' woman. (Who even has her older-older cranky, independent mother living with her - *she* used to be the town's mayor!)

The situation: a serial killer is targeting terminally-ill people, especially the old, and leaving them with contorted mouths and mutilated bodies. It's kind of weird and I had no idea what that was about until the very end. This is the mark of a superior mystery/thriller author IMO as I've read 100's of mystery/thrillers. (I can count all those Nancy Drew books, can't I?)

The writing is superior as the author is also a literary novelist, so his take on how to write is spot-on. No wasted words. Story is all. Yet he knows how to handle suspense, dialogue, description, transitions, etc. So why the four stars?

There were one or two places where I got lost - as though there were missing pages in the book. I don't think there were and I had to re-read to get back on track. I still enjoyed the book and am looking forward to the second in this series.

Theresa says

This first portion of my review does not contain spoilers. Please do not read beyond the bolded comments below if you don't wish to be spoiled on the ending.

I really enjoyed this book. The mystery element is solid and when the point-of-view switches to the killer, it is creepy, frequently gross, and thoroughly engrossing. I think this book would have suffered without the reader being able to get an understanding of the killer's mindset and his "victims". Oddly enough, sometimes I understood the killer's motivations more so than the main character, Hazel. I also should note that I loved DC Wingate from his introduction onward. I truly hope in the future that the author switches to his POV more often. With the other characters, I'm curious to see where Wolfe will go with Sevine (spelling is probably wrong – I was listening to an audiobook).

Aside from the issues I have listed below, I am looking forward to the next book about Hazel and crew. :)

Unfortunately, the reason why this book received four stars instead of the five I planned to give it contains **MAJOR SPOILERS ABOUT THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK**. Please do not read on if you do not want the end of this book spoiled for you!

Consider yourself warned...

1st Issue: A side note that bothered me... The killer puts Hazel in the backseat of his car (probably a Cavalier since that is the last vehicle he was driving), hand-cuffed and in the middle seat. She enrages him, he speeds up and then swerves to the shoulder and brakes hard. Hazel's head smacks the side window hard enough to hurt her. Is this even possible from the middle seat? I just can't see someone hitting the side window when buckled in to the middle seat. 'Course, I could very easily be wrong, but it was just another thing that didn't seem right.

2nd Issue: The way that the killer kills himself after a short bit of time with Hazel just didn't seem like something his character would've done. It felt very abrupt, out of character, and promptly pulled me out of the story to do a "WTF?". He has trudged on even though his body *is eating itself* from malnourishment, but a few words from Hazel has him convinced that his whole mission was in vain and the answer is to blow his head off? This disappointed me greatly... I could've foreseen a big, drag out fight between the injured Hazel and ill killer, or him just dropping dead because of the wasted condition of his body, or perhaps he goes to jail, but to kill himself, nope, don't buy it.

3rd Issue: And lastly, Hazel takes the killers body and stuffs it in the trunk of the car she uses to drive back to town. Isn't this a big no-no? Disturbing the crime scene and all? I get that at that point she had broken a lot of procedural laws during the course of the investigation, but I really don't get why she took the body back with her. Couldn't she have just directed the investigators back to the scene to retrieve the body?

Claude says

3 and a half stars.

Well, I just don't know what to write. I did like Detective Inspector Hazel Micallef, sixty-one year old and living with her mother. But it would normally not be the sort of book I like, mainly because of there being too much gore for my taste. However, it was quite a compelling book and I just had to read on to the end.

Mary Gilligan-Nolan says

I read "The Taken" before I read this one, so I read out of order. However, it did not take away from the story. The story follows D.I. Hazel Micallef, in a small town called Port Dundas in Canada. The body of an elderly lady Hazel knows all her life, is found in her home, drained of her blood and yet it would appear, humanely killed. The woman has a terminal illness and it would have seemed to have been an assisted suicide, had it not been for the strange post-death mutilation. When Hazel hears of another similar death a few hundred kilometers away a couple of days later, she goes to look into this death also and soon makes the link that there is a serial killer on the loose, covering his tracks quite well for some time. Hazel is not your

typical lead character. She is 61 years old and has a chronic back problem, which she doses with painkillers and alcohol. She lives with her 87 year old mother and still has a good relationship with her ex-husband, who has now remarried. It is clear Hazel still has feelings for her ex, she has a good relationship with her co-workers also, but now one relationship with her second in command is coming apart, when Hazel refuses to call in the R.C.M.P. to assist with the current case. We know pretty much right off, the man responsible for the killings, but this does not take away from an ending full of high drama and a little suspense. I like this book, despite the fact that the killer is highly competent and yet two cans short of a six pack, there is just something about the style of writing and the authors story-telling ability to keep you on the edge of your seat and able to suspend your belief of the overall plot. There is a third book, which I look forward to tracking down in the New Year.

Jenny says

How do you review this book? It held great promise, the characters were well drawn and interesting but acted irrationally. The plot was complicated but lacked direction and believability.

Spoilers Follow:

I'm still not sure what motivated the killer. Nor am I sure why Det Insp Hazel Micallif refused to call in the Canadian Mounted Police when she realised there was a serial killer on the rampage. It would seem the logical thing to do. No, instead she kept silent and eventually called in a TV true crime show to help catch the killer. If I was Canadian I would be deeply offended by the portrayal of the law enforcement agencies concerned.

There are so many other things I could criticise; the random scene with Wingate and the female pilot which was obviously included just to point out Wingate was gay, the easy way the killer gained access to Micallef's home where her 87 year old mother was playing poker with her friends who all thought it was one of their number running late, the complete lack of police procedure at the crime scenes and most importantly, the fact that the killer had already committed numerous other murders in a short space of time and no one was the wiser! I mean to say, how common is it for terminally ill people to commit suicide by cutting their throats?

Read at your own peril!

Charlotte says

woah. this was a seriously good murder mystery. a friend who is a book distributor told me that "this is the new margaret atwood," & I thought he meant it metaphorically, but now I'm wondering if he meant it literally. the back cover says "Inger Wolfe is the pseudonym of a prominent North American literary novelist." hmmm. in any case, if you have a stomach for gore and like salty 61-year-old female police chiefs, buy this book. I couldn't put it down.

Gina says

This was an excellent new author for me to read. The book was original in plotline and mostly stayed at a fast pace. All of the characters were "real" to me and for most of my reading I didn't want to put the book down. The book was a little slow in the beginning then there was some less edgy parts in the middle which is why I marked it down to 4 stars. When I think of the characters, plotline, and setting, it reminded me of Lois Penny's series of books with Detective Armand Gamache, only the female version. I love how the chief of police was a 60 something woman, which doesn't happen often in police mysteries. It gave the feminine side of the job a good description. It told how she was bogged down with caring for her mother and worrying over her 2 children which would never be described if the main character were male, no matter the age. I am definitely going to be reading the rest of the series to see what this misfit gang of police will be up to next. I highly recommend this to any lover of Louise Penny or any other reader who likes a strong female lead in a police procedural. 4 stars!
