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Karin Fossum , Charlotte Barslund (Translator)

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A woman wakes up in the middle of the night. A strange man is in her bedroom. She lies there in silence, paralyzed with fear. The woman is an author and the man one of her characters, one in a long line that waits in her driveway for the time when she'll tell their stories. He is so desperate that he has resorted to breaking into her house and demanding that she begin. He, the author decides, is named Alvar Eide, forty-two years old, single, works in a gallery. He lives a quiet, orderly life and likes it that way—no demands, no unpleasantness. Until one icy winter day when a young drug addict, skinny and fragile, walks into the gallery. Alvar gives her a cup of coffee to warm her up. And then one day she appears on his doorstep. *Broken* is an unconventional, subtle, and disturbing mystery from a master of the form.

Broken Details

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Author : Karin Fossum , Charlotte Barslund (Translator)

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From Reader Review Broken for online ebook

Jaime says

I loved Fossum's Black Seconds, so I expected to like this by default. The book's concept, that a character is harassing the author to write about him and must face the story she presents to him, is definitely a bit indulgent. It feels like something she wrote while stuck on another project, something that probably should never have been published. But that wasn't my problem with it. The main character, Alvar, is at first intrigued by the young, drug-addicted waif that wanders into the gallery where he works. Later, she just takes advantage of him.

Here is where I confess that I only made it about 3/4 of the way through the book and have no idea what happened in the end, because the more she pushed him and took advantage of him and the more he found himself unable to say no to her, the more uncomfortable it made me feel. Real, deep in my chest, bordering on anxiety uncomfortable. I guess you could consider it a plus that the author was able to invoke those sorts of feelings in me, but it really just meant that I had to put down the book. Maybe it all turned out okay in the end, and everyone got their due — I just don't know. I'll definitely continue to read Fossum's Inspector Sejer series, but I'll have to give anything like this a pass.

Kim Kaso says

An odd little book, half mystery of sorts, in the way living our lives are always mysteries to be solved, half a meditation on the writer's life and process. Quietly intriguing, and a little frustrating as the protagonist is so passive in his own life that one wants to shake him awake, make him act. A departure from the Sejer mysteries, that is for certain.

Daniela says

4.5 (a very strong one).

Alvar Eide really wants to be a good person. He is somehow traumatized by an experience as a child when his parents purposely ignored a woman asking for help after her car crashed. That is why he tries so hard. The problem is that Alvar really isn't a people's person. He is shy, paranoid, naive and ordely to the point of madness. He is what we would call a control freak. And he is, obviously, totally unprepared to deal with people and with unexpected situations.

This is already a good premise if a bit overused. But Karin Fossum is a wonderful writer. She turned this into a dark story, where it could have be humorous, and she added the bonus of going beyond linear story-telling by creating a relationship between character and author so that they really are the two main characters. This means we never loose sight of the fact that Alvar is a fictional character created by a person because we witness that process of creation. But at the same time the author is also a character in the book and we are left wondering what separates the line between fiction and reality.

It is a wonderful twist on the usual unsocial man's tale. But it is more than that. The overlooming threat of suicide - provoked by the character's inability to deal with life - turns this into a desperate and fatalistic novel. But at the end there's a ray of hope. Harsher critics might point out that the ending does not fit the

story she was telling and the mood she created. Perhaps it is true. But I feel that dear, fragile Alvar who really wanted - and was - to be a good person deserved hope. I am glad he got it, somewhere, wherever he is now.

John says

I was expecting something along the lines of the previous Fossum novels I'd read -- first-rate murder mysteries/psychological thrillers -- and so was rather startled by what I got.

The conceit of one half of this novel is that fiction writers interact with their characters as if the latter were real people. (I know for my own, humble part that this is very often true.) An author who seems very much like Karin Fossum finds that a man has pushed to the front of the queue of potential main characters outside her house to invade her living space and demand that he be the protagonist of her next novel. A shy loner, he's never dared to assert himself like this -- or, really, in any way -- before.

At first reluctantly, she accedes to his demands, and the story that she writes about him forms the other, intertwined half of the book.

He becomes Alvar Eide, middle-aged, solitary, gay, socially inept, overly self-analytical manager of a commercial art gallery. One day a frail young homeless junkie pushes her way into the gallery and, inspired by a rare burst of fellow-feeling, Alvar gives her a cup of coffee, expecting never to see her again.

But instead the young woman, who changes her name at whim, invades his home and his life (much as Alvar has invaded the home and the life of the author), pillaging him spiritually and, for her fixes, financially. His life savings, which he'd intended to invest in a painting he's fallen in love with, *Broken*, depicting a half-destroyed bridge that leads to nowhere, vanish despite his will into his parasite's veins. And yet, although he loathes what's happening, he's honest enough with himself to recognize that he too is getting something out of their unwritten bargain.

Even so, the situation can end nowhere but badly . . .

After two or three chapters I almost put the book aside -- there are plenty of pretentious novels around, and this seemed to be just another of them, with its interminable paragraphs and its overall air of being designed to be good for me -- but luckily I kept going, because Alvar's half of the story (less so the other) got well and truly under my skin. It created a genuine suspense for me, a real sense of apprehension as to what might come next, yet this apprehension -- and I'm trying to choose my words carefully here -- was born not of terror or excitement but of something akin to irritation, or even anger: I was infuriated by what *life* (or the nameless author?) had chosen to throw at Alvar, and I kept compulsively reading in hopes that *life* would get its deserved comeuppance.

In the end I enjoyed *Broken* really quite a lot. At the same time, it was the first Fossum novel I'd read where I was conscious throughout that I was reading a translation -- the words didn't vanish, the way they normally do -- and I wondered, too, if it had been written very early in Fossum's career and dug out of the drawer for publication once she'd established herself as a titan of Scandi crime fiction. So I have mixed feelings, in other words. But on balance the mix leans toward the favorable.

Minty McBunny says

Like many of the reviewers here, I ordered this book thinking it was another entry in my beloved Inspector Sejer series. Initially I was disappointed when I discovered it was not, but after a few chapters, I was intrigued. Fossum uses a nifty plot device here, at first I kept reminding myself that Alvar Eide's story was being made up as it went along and he wasn't real, but then I laughed at myself for it, realizing that his story is no different than any other fiction novel I might read, it's just that in this one we see the puppeteer working the strings. I deeply enjoyed this book & I am glad I gave it a chance.

Carmen says

This novel reminded me a lot of the brilliant movie 'Stranger Than Fiction'. An author is confronted by one of her characters, and she writes a story for him. It is a grim story...after all this is Karin Fossum we're talking about. I didn't enjoy this book as much as her Inspector Sejer mystery novels, but it was a great read all the same. She really gets into the human psyche. I highly recommend this book. Translated into English from Norwegian.

Jay says

Broken
by Karin Fossum

Book Review by Jay Gilbertson

Imagine waking up late one night and there's a man standing next to your bed. You'd freak—right? Well not author Fossum. She just sat up and had a chat with the guy. Like she was expecting him and actually; she was. Welcome to the strange world of Alvar Eide.

Though it's hard to decide how in the world this novel is a mystery as the cover would have you believe, pay careful attention; it's slyly revealed. And one also has to keep in mind that this is a translated work and perhaps the author's voice was somehow muddled or re-worked. Since I don't know Norwegian, though I do have some coursing through my veins, I had to rely on Charlotte Barslund's (the translator) expertise in capturing Fossum's voice. And what a voice.

From the start there is a subtle tension that draws you into the bizarre world of how a story could unfold. The writing is spare and concise and impeccable. Chapters move from the character, Alvar, living his odd, lonely life as an art dealer to his interaction with Fossum. Of course you're never sure if indeed the character is actually speaking with the author or if this is yet another character. Therein lies the mystery and yet if you whittle things down a bit and are able to put the book aside and consider the odd use of having a character actually involved in the formation of how his life will or won't actually turn out—it's really a mind bender—and it's fun.

“Well, I would hate to be a nuisance. I have absolutely no wish to intrude...I'm not normally like this. But the thing is, I've been waiting for so long and I just can't bear it any longer...I'm waiting for my story to be told.”

Fossum treats Alvar with a refreshing kindness that I really appreciated. Most authors like to drag their characters through all sorts of misery and heartache and loss and then, in the last breath, in strolls a ray of hope in all its glory. No, instead, this man is someone we know. A true outsider, yet with all the humanness each and every one of us struggles with. One of the main themes of this story is the hunger we all have, in one degree or another; to belong. And the other is simply to do the right thing and as we humans do (some of us anyway) we wonder just what in the world is The Right Thing?

One day as Alvar is living through his tightly structured life, in walks a very troubled young woman and viola,' the story takes a twisty turn and that's all I'm gunna say about that.

An aspect, or character flaw that made me a little crazy was how, no matter what was heaped into Alvar's path, he did nothing. Several times I really wanted to reach into the story and smack him and tell him to "Wake up!"

If I had to classify this novel I would call it a very dark character study and a really compelling read—not for everyone—but perfect for you...

James Thane says

This unconventional novel by Karin Fossum will delight some readers and, I suspect, confuse and frustrate others. Fossum, a Norwegian, is perhaps best known for her crime fiction series featuring Inspector Konrad Sejer. Here she attempts something completely different and unusual.

As the book opens, a middle aged female writer whose name we never learn, is cowering behind her curtains one night, looking down her driveway at the long line of characters who are waiting for her to tell their stories. The weight of the burden the characters impose upon her is almost too much to bear and she turns to drink and pills to get her through the night.

On this night, though, she awakens, panicked, in the middle of the night to find a man in her room. One of her upcoming characters has jumped the line and invaded her bedroom. He insists that the writer tell his story now. The writer tries to explain that the man must wait his turn, but he's worried because the writer is getting older and is not taking very good care of herself. He's desperately afraid that she might die before getting to him and that his story will never be told.

Reluctantly, the woman agrees to his request, and the man comes to life on her computer as Alvar Eide. He's single, in his early forties, and works in an art gallery. He's a very quiet, mild-mannered man who has difficulty relating to other people. But his life is well-ordered and he is content with it. Then one bitterly cold afternoon a young female drug addict stumbles into the gallery in an effort to get warm and Alvar does something totally out of character. Rather than immediately insisting that she leave the gallery, he offers her a cup of coffee, and this simple act will change the course of his life.

As the story progresses, Alvar continues to periodically interrupt the writer. He is concerned about the way he is being portrayed; he fears for what might happen to him. The writer patiently explains that once things are set in motion, she has little or no control. She must follow the story wherever it leads her, and Alvar must accept the consequences. Alvar is not sure he likes this at all, but watching his progress and observing his interaction with his creator is a fascinating experience.

Writers often say that characters sometimes assume a life of their own and I suspect that this is a difficult

thing to grasp for people who are not writers and who assume that writers have complete control of the stories they write and the characters they create. But while a writer might consciously plan out a book to the last detail, that carefully constructed plan often cannot account for the actions of a mischievous subconscious.

Perhaps only another writer who has experienced that moment when, seemingly out of nowhere a character says or does something that takes you completely by surprise, can really appreciate what Fossum has done here. Which is to say that I enjoyed this book immensely, but I can understand why others might not be as enthused about it as I am.

Rachel Hall says

I always breathe a sigh of relief on finishing a novel by Karin Fossum that I have made it through intact, never mind that the process often feels as harrowing and traumatic as a slow evisceration. Broken is a standalone work of true suspense that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction and is quite different from the police procedural novels of Fossum which feature Inspector Konrad Sejer. Indeed it is debatable which genre this novel fits into, but either way it is an assault on the senses which invades the readers comfort zone.

A fifty-one-year old author watches from her bedroom window the array of various characters who stand in her drive under the porch light and patiently wait for their stories to be told, for it is her job to give life to them and that burden takes its toll. Each is desperately hoping for a chance of her telling their story but one is more impatient than the others, jumping the queue, disrupting her sleep and breaking into the house to beseech the author to take up the rest of his story. Given that the author in question is dependent on anti-depressants, sleeping pills and alcohol to salve her journey through each and every day, she herself is as fragile as any of her characters. The forty-two year old single and self-contained Alvar Eide is the character so keen for her to continue his story, a perfectly orderly man, undemanding and unassuming. His life is dictated by routines and his solitary nature, meaning he has no callers to his house and no friends to speak of. He enjoys his job working in an art gallery and is a hardworking and honest employee with a true appreciation for the artwork that covers the walls.

As Fossum takes up the story of Alvar we get to observe his daily travails, daily visits to the deli counter to purchase his evening meal on his way home from work through to checking his tuft of hair (comb-over) is retained in position. More and more he finds himself questioning whether he is a good man, needless to say that the test Fossum presents him with is a young heroin addict who drifts from one place to the next. From sheltering in the gallery and Alvar giving her a cup of coffee and his scarf, she is soon borrowing money and encroaching on his boundaries, all in all presenting a new challenge. Fossum throws test after test at Alvar and he reveals himself to be weak-willed, lacking in spine and completely out of his depth with the young woman. Art touches Alvar and the Broken referred to in the title is a painting that the gallery acquires by a little known artist, depicting a severed bridge that speaks to Alvar's soul and seems to echo his own problems with making connections and attachments to other people. It literally reflects how he has always felt and his own exclusion from society and priced at seventy thousand kroner it would require his life savings to purchase. Yet as he finds himself immune to the will of the young drug addict and the first significant human connection he has made he supplies her with money when she emotionally blackmails into financing her habit. From the threat of turning tricks and placing herself in danger, Alvar soon finds his savings drained and his chances of acquiring the painting reduced to nil with his decisions no longer a conscious choice.

The alternating chapters move between seeing Alvar's daily life and then seeing him rejoin the author (Fossum) who is telling his story, apologising for being a nuisance whilst also aiming to flex some muscle

and manipulate the direction of his tale. Fossum argues that this is against the rules, but tells him the date of November 18th when he will take control of his own life once again. The fate awaiting Alvar is almost a forgone conclusion in Fossum's hands. It is hard to apportion blame in Broken but when a person begs an author for the opportunity to be explored they surely cannot expect to dictate the events that unfold, given the real test is how one copes in the aftermath.

Whose story is this? Is Broken the tale of an author's torture as they wrangle with their creation or is Alvar Eide the main focus of the novel? Whilst I remain in a quandary as regards this, what I can say with certainty is that is the tale of two vulnerable outsiders on a path to destruction and the good intentions and of a gentle man to contribute to society come back to haunt both of them. A bizarre and unique tale, with typically sparing prose and honesty, meaning it is by no means an easy read. That the finale of Broken sees surprises and several unexpected stings in the tail is Fossum's forte, and this tale of an eccentric loner sent a backbone revealing challenge could only have come from her pen. It is ambitious of Fossum to tell a story of an author battling it out with her protagonist and it presents the reader with an insight into the mind of a creative genius. Posing questions such as how much of an internal battle authors have with their characters and the creative process, it confounded me how I became so drawn into a fictional tale of an even more fictional character! This sounds confusing but Broken is a story to be read, re-read and processed gradually over time. Marvellous.

Betsy says

A friend lent me this book. With the extra edge of it being a library book. (I could have ruined her library credit *forever!*!) So I delayed reviewing it until I'd actually returned the book to the library and didn't have that karmic horror hanging over me. And I *did* return it. And then I forgot.

But! This is a good book that I totally enjoyed reading and would easily recommend. One of the first good signs is that whatever a character was eating sounded delicious. Also, Alvar's job in an art gallery sounded awesome. And I take both as reliable signs of a good author. If a character enjoys what they're eating, that should come through. If they love their job -- especially if they're the point-of-view character -- I should share their enthusiasm. Fossum has that covered.

But! What's truly fascinating about the story is something that could have come across as a far-too-clever author's trick. Something mildly entertaining because it's unusual but quickly outstays its welcome and leaves you itching for them to just get to the story already. We're introduced to Alvar when he invades the author's home and insists (politely) that she write about him. From then on his story is intercut with his interaction with the author writing his story.

I *loved* it. Alvar is an interesting character all on his own, but a great deal more interest gets teased out by his interaction with the author. And we see how his anxieties shape the story that unfolds. For example, at one point he describes his fears to the author as a gray rat inside his chest, gnawing away. The next day, in the story, a gray form blows into the art gallery -- a character that will change his quiet, safe world.

And that works with the author as well. (She becomes a character in her own right and I'm sure there's a lot of discussion as to whether or not she's actually Karin Fossum. But as this is the first book I've read of hers and so my ignorance of her is deep, I have no opinion on that subject.) At one point the author talks with Alvar about death and her relationship with it and the next day a painting arrives at the art gallery that is pretty much death.

So yes, a quiet story that stays with you. One I'm looking forward to reading again someday. (Certainly I'll be looking for more of Karin Fossum's work.)

Jim Fonseca says

A great book by the queen of the Norwegian crime novelists. A gay man, a candidate for the world's most introverted person – no friends, no travel, no life really - becomes involved with – a better term is “controlled by” -- a young girl who is a drug-addicted prostitute. One day she simply wanders in to the art gallery where he works. She ends up dead and that is our crime to be resolved. The book has an unusual twist in that the main character comes in to talk with the author about his role and his portrayal in the book. The author comes across as almost as lonely and introverted as the main character. A good read.

Paul Patterson says

Broken is Fossum's standalone novel it is a totally authentic exposition of a writer's intimate relationship and responsibility toward their characters. A negligible line is drawn between the worlds of the writer and her character Alvar Eide, they speak with one another directly, every other chapter The reader is treated to a much more literary version of this theme as seen in Stranger Than Fiction, an excellent recent movie starring Will Farrell. The movie is comedic and also displays the struggle between the truths of reality and those of the imagination. Fossum has done something even more significant, she has shown the interplay of character and writer in a far more realistic, meaningful and advantageous mode. Fiction is sometimes more truthful than reality and reality is more fictional than the imagination.

Alvar interrupts the writer's project by skipping the cue of other characters who are all vying for attention. Alvar a rather limp individual is nevertheless persistent and demanding toward the writer. In his fictional world he is an art salesman, a nice person, and a cypher living alone in order to avoid the demands of social life. Throughout the novel he is driven to acknowledge the culpability being passive in a variety of ways. A boring character is one of the hardest to write and yet to sustain the reader's attention; Alvar is indeed boring but he has hooked me from the get go. The novel has reminded me to take imagination seriously it fiction can considerably enrich our quotidian lives. Remember, if you are familiar with Karin Fossum, keep Sjer and the mysteries out of your mind while reading Broken it is definitely a novel and a good one at that.

Jeanette says

Karin Fossum's experimental exercise? How disappointing was this book to me? Very. Few things bore me more than authors who write about writing, the process or the conceptual proclivities. But one of them may be milquetoast men who are morose and fairly OCD controlling. Some of her stand alones are excellent. I don't need a Sejer. And I am still a fan.

Her skill in writing characterization and her locale feel here were as crisp as always. But the gimmick and the interplay for plot? Not a winner. Sincerely hope this isn't a sign she is going into magic realism or back to poetry. No, Karin, no!

Andy Weston says

I was lured to this by Fossum's other stand alone, *I Can See In The Dark*, which was tremendous. This is also a good read, though quite different. So different that it really isn't in the 'crime' genre, and I guess is more of a literary novel. The main story of Alvar Eide and his lonely existence is a strangely captivating one. If someone had told me that was the main part of the story, a middle-aged man living by himself, working in an art studio, with no friends and little interaction with anyone else, I would have probably not bothered with the book. But I know Fossum's talent. Eide becomes acquainted with a young girl who is a heroine addict and takes advantage of his good nature and his loneliness.

Meanwhile the author is writing this story. This aspect of the novel, which happens intermittently during the Eide story, seems unnecessary until the final few pages, but is a venture from Fossum, which for me only worked partially, I would have been quite happy without it.

Vicky says

Since I read so many mysteries, I usually don't review them or add them to my Goodreads list, but this is an exception. After discovering Henning Mankel many years ago, I really became a fan of the many Scandinavian mystery/thriller authors. Karin Fossum (Norwegian) is one of the best. Although categorized as mystery (has the library mystery sticker) this is not part of her previous series. This is a very literate exploration of the relationship between a writer and the characters he/she creates and how the author lives with them and in some cases how they take over his/her life. I also really liked her discussion of art and how we choose art (the main character works in an art gallery). The story is suspenseful, but it is much more about our relationships and friendship and taking chances.

Carol says

Feh.

Awful stand-alone book by the author of the Inspector Sejer series. Her attempts at magical realism (author's future character comes to her apartment to speak to her about what she'll write about him), depressingly predictable characters, no mystery and not much plot.

Double feh.

Mary Gilligan-Nolan says

This is a book that comes along once and a while and takes you by complete surprise. I am giving it 5 stars because I think it was clever yet simple and was successful in drawing me in to caring about what happened to the main character to the point of being on pins and needles. I wanted to read it to see what was going to happen next and also was reluctant to on occasions because I was afraid things would end badly. This is a departure from Karin Fossum's usual crime series, a one-off and it proves that she is indeed, a great writer. The basis of the story is, an author awakes one night to find a strange man in her bedroom. A potential fictional character for a book she has in the future, but the man insists she writes his story immediately,

because he is afraid she will die before his story is told. Now, I don't want to give too much away, as this is a review and basically the purpose of a review in my opinion is to give a recommendation for or against the book and let everyone else make their own minds up about it. I loved this book, it was a simple plot, a simple story about a simple man, who had routine and order in his life and never deviated from this. Then, an event occurs one day that changes his life forever. I really worried for Alvar Eide (the main character), I cared about what happened to him and this is always a mark of a good writer, when they reel you in and make you care, despite the fact, you know it is fiction. This is a book that I would recommend without hesitation. It's quite short by most standards, I only got it to fill in time while I was waiting an order of books to arrive into my local library. It proved to be a great investment of my time and I am glad I picked it up.

Julie says

Read it after being intrigued by a Boston Globe review. An author who wakes up to find a man in her room-- a character who wants his story to be written. Enjoyed the pace of his uneventful life (reminiscent of Remains of the Day) as well as the notion of an author's relationship with her character being interspersed between chapters of his story. Makes me think about how stories are created, how much of the writer is in the story, how much the story is independent of the writer. Also liked the undercurrent of Norway. Enjoyable as a piece of literature in its own right, and also intriguing for its narrative construct.

Virginia says

I can't sleep. I look out my darkened window. Lined in the driveway are all the authors I've been wanting to read. They stare up at my window, demanding to make an audience of me. These authors torture me. It's so hard to make the commitment to read one of their works. Anthony Trollope exchanges barbs with Wodehouse while Thomas Pynchon stands aloof. Henning Mankell and Jo Nesbo are huddled together with the Scandinavian literati, smoking and drinking coffee, when Karin Fossum pushes her way past them with her goblet of wine, waving her book *Broken* up at me. "Hey! Hey, you! You know you committed to reading this in your book club!" Roberto Bolano spits. "Goddamn book club," he hisses. He knows my book clubs are never going to select *The Savage Detectives*. He knows it's destined to sit on my shelf, collecting dust. I sigh. Why do these authors haunt me? There's so many of them! And why do so many of them have to write trilogies and even quartets! I glance at Elana Ferrante, but she casually pretends to examine some dust on her Italian leather shoes. But Karin is right, and as she stumbles up my path, sloshing her merlot all over Tom Wolfe's white suit, I reach for my library copy of *Broken*.

Ms.pegasus says

What is the relationship between an author and her creation? It is this unconventional question that author Karin Fossum explores here. She exposes her secret hopes and fears in the most intimate way. The book opens with a character, a mild polite man in his 40's who intrudes himself in the dead of night into her bedroom. She will come to name him Alvar Eides. Alvar was one of many prospective characters who haunt her driveway. They are a panoply of humanity, damaged, brooding, grieving, and even briefly hopeful, that await the attention of her writing. Alvar is insistent. He wants her to tell his story next, even if it means sailing uncharted waters. The dialogs between Alvar and the author will provide the reader with the charts needed to navigate this unusual book.

Fossum invents Alvar in the way an artist paints with oils. She applies layers of translucent detail. She makes him an art connoisseur employed at a private gallery. There, he is an observant matchmaker between client and the right work of art, rather than a mere salesperson. She gives him a backstory to add dimension to his overly cautious personality: a timid repressed father and an overbearing self-centered mother, and the traumatic childhood impressions that froze him into a state of permanent anxiety.

Parallels between the author and Alvar emerge. They both share a unique sensitivity. They both thrive on their cyclic routines. She confides that like Alvar, she is burdened with anxiety. Will her stories be honest? Will people care? Is it enough if only she cares about her characters? She voices one of her many fears: *"...that what I spent my time on has no importance whatsoever."* (p.101) She describes the mix of elation and regret she feels when a book is completed. The elation is short-lived. The regret is from parting with characters she has spent a year of her life with. Having sold a painting of a waterfall which hung in the gallery for two years, Alvar reflects: *"All the paintings hang there. They were like old friends to him. Selling a painting was always an ambiguous experience. It meant it disappeared and he would never see it again. Paintings he had been studying for several months could suddenly be snatched away. But then a joyful event followed that never failed to lift his spirits. Ole Krantz would hang a new one. Today the waterfall was leaving and Alvar would miss its roaring water torrents."* (p.54)

The author's cyclic routine is darker. Her anxiety returns as she summons a new character into her life and begins the process again. Alvar's love for art is a passion. The author's need to write is a compulsion. Both of them are pricked by existential angst, but being the more experienced of the two, she promises Alvar that she will provide him with opportunities for brief respite from his self-doubt and anxiety, and perhaps even for brief elation. However, he must make the choices. He must be responsible for his own emotional liberation.

The author admits she is conflicted. The story she writes will not be an altruistic endeavor. It is a test of sorts. It is also something she wants to discover about herself: *"...I need to resolve something within myself along the way.... Where do I place you in terms of morality, what do I think about the way you live your life. Are you a coward, are you arrogant, are you socially maladjusted, or are you an attractive man with a pure heart? You have a fair amount of resources and talents but you've isolated yourself and you're terrified of going off the rails."* (p.135)

The cover proclaims that this is a mystery. That is a misleading description. The author coyly refers to this book as a modest story about a modest man. It is really an engaging exploration of the writer's craft. On finishing this book the reader will be drawn to wonder how Fossum has created such a disturbing impact with such sparse materials. Her pace is unhurried. Alvar's transformation from a colorless character to a sympathetic one is gradual. The tension that moves the story forward is embedded in the author's changing relationship to Alvar rather than by the plot itself. This was an interesting book.
