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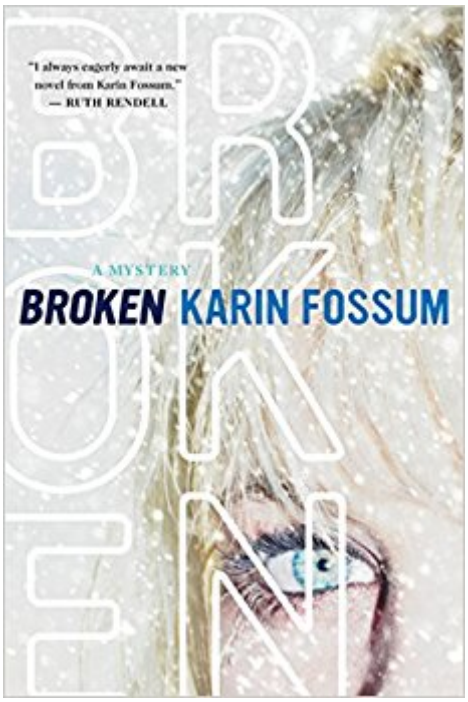

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Synopsis

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 sheÃ¢â ¬â„¢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 wayÃ¢â ¬â •no demands, no unpleasantness. Until the icy winter morning 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.Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“A superb writer of psychological suspense.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â œNew York Times --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

HMH hardcover, 2010Previous ISBN 978-0-15-101366-1

I love Karin Fossum’s novels, and pre-ordered this so I could read it as soon as possible. But it turns out to be the exception that proves the rule. In this novel, Fossum herself (or an unnamed novelist who speaks in the first person) is one of the central characters, growing more and more involved in

a Pirandello-esque situation where her characters come alive, affecting the outcome of the conventional novel that is proceeding in parallel. If it sounds complex, it is. As a demonstration of writerly pyrotechnics, it works nicely, but I didn't enjoy it the way I have her other books.

A writer agonizing over the line of people waiting to have their stories told is surprised one evening when one of those characters invades her bedroom. After a bit of conversation, they decide on a name for him--Alvar Eide--and she agrees to start his story. She carved out his life: living alone, working in an art gallery, and shunning basic human interactions until a thin and freezing drug-addicted young girl wanders into the gallery one day. And Alvar does something unexpected - he offers her a cup of coffee to warm her.From time to time throughout the book, Alvar stops in on the author to discuss the story, particularly when things aren't going as he expected. Avar is shy and socially inept, and a celibate homosexual who works at Ole Krantz's Art Gallery selling paintings. He has saved his money and has found a painting in the gallery that he feels absorbed with and desperately wants to buy; however, like all other things in his life he is unable to make a decision. The name of the painting is "Broken"It was not an exciting book but to my surprise, I rather enjoyed it. Broken is a quiet, languid philosophical book for people who enjoy pondering the mysteries of the human condition, or those who just enjoy character studies. What made this novel even more disturbing was how real each character felt, despite having exaggerated personalities. At the end, you may be left wondering whether we are creations of divine inspiration or the puppets of a frustrated novelist.

Karen Fossum is a first-rate crime writer, but "Broken" doesn't fit in that category and isn't really even a mystery. The writing is still excellent (including translation from the Norwegian original), but this is more a meditation on writing fiction and what the responsibilities of being a human being entail. These themes do not make for a rollicking story, but this is actually a pretty entertaining book in its own way. Author Fossum sets up three tracks (and three principal characters) for the book. The first is the fictional author's internal dialogue--her thoughts on writing and her solitary life. The second is a dialogue between the fictional author and one of her want-to-be characters. And the third is a narrative with dialogue that chronicles the want-to-be character's daily life, including interactions with others and his own internal dialogue. This is literally a work in progress as the process of writing by the author establishes the fictional character's direction in life. Is anybody still with me here?This is an uncomfortable book to read as it raises questions of civic and personal responsibility that we all struggle with every day. In this story, for example, the principal character,

who always wants to do the "right thing", finds that that might mean the most difficult and inconvenient thing. There are times that this character makes some questionable decisions that you know will have negative consequences. You are watching that proverbial slow-motion car wreck. Painful.Fossum gets points for originality in setting up the story and for provoking some thought on the part of the readers about their relationships with the rest of society. It's not a book that entertains in the same way her detective stories do, but it does give you something to think about. Think of it as a Nordic cousin of some of Albert Camus' existentialist novels.

So what is Broken? Does Fossum refer to the Painting, Alvar who works in the art gallery, the author within the book who tells Alvar's story or the young female heroin addict? Or are all of the above broken?It is a difficult read and I finally concluded Alvar is the Nowhere Man the Beatles sang about so very long ago. "Doesn't have a point of view, knows not what he wants to do....." Sometimes, I found myself yelling at Alvar, "Get a life!" and at other times, "You are so clueless!"My hat's off to Fossum who made me WANT to know what happens to the painting, Alvar, the author and the girl.

Very unusual book! From a perspective that I've never encountered - excellentbut so different from anything I've read before. Written from a writer's perspectivewho seemed to have control over the main character in her "book." Veryintriguing.

Did not know what to expect when I started to read Broken. I do like Karin's character based thrillers but this promised to be something very different. I read Broken in one sitting, just couldn't stop, it is one of her very best and very satisfying works.

It wasn't as dark as I was expecting it to be. Started the book thinking it was going to end in murder, but that's not necessarily the case. Alvar Eide is an inexperienced man who was never very good at socializing with others. When he meets Lindy, a young drug addict, his life is turned upside down. It was interesting enough to keep me going though.

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