ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Torture
Anna Fransén
AuthorHouse
978-1-4259-9412-9
Two Stars (out of Five)

Swede Anna Fransén, author of twelve previous books, relates a harrowing story of domestic abuse at the hands of her alcoholic husband in her memoir *Torture*. Using the pseudonym "Petra," the author depicts herself as a naïve young student, with the strength to battle in street brawls and to fight back when her husband, Hans, hits her. Hans's weepy apologies and promises to reform cause Petra to forgive him, until she realizes she and Malin, her young daughter from a previous relationship, must flee for their lives.

The author depicts with excruciating detail the cycle of mistreatment and apology common to abusive relationships, enabling readers to understand firsthand why it is so difficult for victims to leave these situations. Petra's streetwise upbringing often compels her to fight back, so the audience can see how much survivors will tolerate to stay in such relationships even as they try to protect themselves. While the narrative is mainly from Petra's viewpoint, sections from Hans's point of view—that delve into his violent upbringing—offer context for his angry outbursts and alcoholism, so that one feels compassion for him, too.

Unfortunately, these strong underpinnings do not make for a well-written narrative. Poor editing results in missing periods and commas, which thoroughly impedes understanding of the text. Run-on sentences, comma splices, and insufficient paragraphing often make it difficult to comprehend the action. Usage errors and misspellings—such as "litted" instead of "lit," "pist" instead of "pissed"—are also distracting. It is unclear if such errors, as well as the author's awkward English phrasing, occur because the story was translated from Swedish. A better proofreader, too, could have decreased the number of words that contain missing letters.

With the exceptions of Petra and Hans, characterization in this memoir is just as confusing as its editing. Although the blurb on the back promises Malin will be a key player, the little girl does not appear until the very end. Further, the convoluted writing style makes it difficult to understand why Malin only sees Petra occasionally. Britta, Olavi, Peter, Sivvi, and Matte are all mentioned as supporting characters, yet it is hard to remember who each character

is and how each is related to Petra.

Unknown amounts of time occur between chapters, making it difficult to gauge an accurate timeline for Petra's ordeal. As such, suspense fails to build. The only reason readers know that Petra is gearing up to leave is because she states she is. Indeed, the lack of a clear timeframe makes Petra's decision to leave seem sudden. While graphic descriptions of abuse, insults, and rape are necessary in a domestic violence memoir, the author's detailed descriptions of Petra's vaginal cysts are disgusting, and do little to enhance the narrative.

Writing this memoir was clearly a triumphal experience for Fransén. However, only the most persistent of readers will gain something from *Torture*.

Jill Allen