



Music for Torching

By A. M. Homes

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As A.M. Homes's incendiary novel unfolds, the Kodacolor hues of the good life become nearly hallucinogenic. Laying bare the foundations of a marriage, flash frozen in the anxious entropy of a suburban subdivision, Paul and Elaine spin the quiet terrors of family life into a fantastical frenzy that careens out of control. From a strange and hilarious encounter with a Stepford Wife neighbor to an ill-conceived plan for a tattoo, to a sexy cop who shows up at all the wrong moments, to a housecleaning team in space suits, a mistress calling on a cell phone, and a hostage situation at a school, A.M. Homes creates characters so outrageously flawed and deeply human that they are entirely believable.

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Music for Torching By A. M. Homes Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

As Quentin Crisp used to say, "Don't keep up with the Joneses! *Drag them down to your level!*" This could be the motto of the suburbanites in A.M. Homes's fourth novel, *Music for Torching*. Homes has a subtle eye and ear for suburban reality, but beware: she is no mere satirist of what James Joyce called the "muddle crass." Behind each neat, bright lawn, vile lives writhe in darkness. On the surface, Paul and Elaine are conventionally competitive middle-aged, middle-class people with banal yearnings for French doors and a new deck. They have two strapping boys. Their neighbors Pat and George are prodigies of efficient family life. But alone with Elaine, Pat drops the Stepford Wife mask and stages loveless orgies atop the throbbing washer, amid the Downy and Fantastik and Bon Ami. Meanwhile, Paul beds a local wife and a sinister mistress. The nice old man down the street downloads Internet child porn. Local kids join the Boy Scouts and bite off teachers' fingers. It's all about lurid misery and false fronts: a minor character is named Claire Roth, surely alluding to the bitter relationship in Claire Bloom's *Leaving a Doll's House* and Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist*.

Paul and Elaine first popped up in Homes's collection *The Safety of Objects*, as a couple having the happiest night of their lives smoking crack while the kids are away. Their happiest night here is when they tip the barbecue and burn their house halfway down. The story proceeds with a nightmare zombie logic from there, with a funny-scary ironic tone. "Paul notices that the color of her eye shadow is Fiction, and her lipstick is called Sheer Fraud.... 'What happened to the dining-room table, Elaine? Why'd you chop it to pieces?'" he wonders. "The damage was irreparable," his wife replies. Homes describes nice people doing not-so-nice deeds in luminous, precise prose way better than Bret Easton Ellis, as well as Joyce Carol Oates, and occasionally within range of John Updike. But Homes is really the evil spawn of Grace Metalious and Quentin Tarantino. --*Tim Appelo*

From Publishers Weekly

A child enters a suburban grammar school with a gun and explosives strapped to his body; a SWAT team moves in; a boy is shot at close range. This creepy and all too familiar scenario appears at a pivotal moment of Homes's latest novel (after *The End of Alice*), a caustically funny and eerily plausible portrait of a suburban family meltdown. In a nondescript Leave-it-to-Beaveresque Westchester neighborhood, Elaine and Paul find their marriage and their lives at a standstill: Paul commutes to a vaguely sinister corporate job ("how do you make people think fat is good?" asks his boss at one point) and enjoys weekly trysts with a neighbor, while Elaine plays housewife, attends school plays, and shops. Both feel desperately "stuck." In a fit of boredom and frustration, following two nights of cocktail parties and barbecues with the neighbors, the two kick their grill to the ground and partially burn down their house, an event that plunges them into a sordid suburban nightmare. Moving in with what seems the perfect couple, Pat and George, they leave their boys with families they scarcely know. A decision with perilous consequences. Paul begins popping pills and has an affair with a friend's girlfriend, a psychic known only as "the date," who has a penchant for phone sex and persuades him to get a tattoo on his shaved crotch, while Elaine is seduced by Pat, a Stepford Wife with a penchant for sex toys. Homes unflinchingly documents the disintegration of Elaine and Paul's family, paying explicit attention to the sexual ennui and sadistic impulses roiling beneath the sterile veneers of their lives. The dark underbelly of the average American neighborhood may seem an obvious theme, and Homes's vision of marital dysfunction is long on sardonic humor and short on profundity. But the denouement to which this disquieting tale carefully builds is powerful enough to seem coextensive with the latest, and most distressing, real-life suburban horrors. (May)

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From Library Journal

What better ways for a hateful, hate-filled couple to alleviate their middle-aged suburban blues than to set fire to their home, sleep around, get a groin tattoo of snaking ivy during an executive lunch at the behest of the cheating girlfriend of one of their best friends, cross-dress, curse each other endlessly, and treat their parental responsibilities as an annoying afterthought? Paul and Elaine live ugly lives doing ugly things to each other. They both have affairs with neighborhood wives, passively allow other sexual peccadilloes to happen to them, and then wonder why they are so miserable. Homes (The End of Alice, LJ 12/95) employs flat, stilted dialog to create a whiner's anthem of thoroughly unlikable people. To spice up this go-nowhere tale, she pulls out a headline from real news to create a tragedy of innocence wounded long before the actual bullet is fired. For larger libraries with a Homes fan base. ABeth E. Andersen, Ann Arbor Dist. Lib., MI
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Florence Adams:

Book is to be different for every grade. Book for children until finally adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important normally. The book Music for Torching seemed to be making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The guide Music for Torching is not only giving you more new information but also being your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your personal spend time to read your publication. Try to make relationship with all the book Music for Torching. You never truly feel lose out for everything should you read some books.

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