



Days of Awe: Stories

A.M. Homes

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With her signature humor and compassion, A.M. Homes exposes the heart of an uneasy America in her new collection - exploring our attachments to each other through characters who aren't quite who they hoped to become, though there is no one else they can be.

In *A Prize for Every Player*, a man is nominated to run for president by the customers of a big box store, while he and his family do their weekly shopping. At a conference on genocide(s) in the title story, old friends rediscover themselves and one another - finding spiritual and physical comfort in ancient traditions. And in *Hello Everybody* and *She Got Away*, Homes revisits a Los Angeles family obsessed with the surfaces and frightened of what lives below.

In the nearly three decades since her seminal debut collection *The Safety of Objects*, Homes has been celebrated by readers and critics alike as one of our boldest and most original writers, acclaimed for her psychological accuracy and "satire so close to the truth it's terrifying" (Ali Smith). Her first book since the Women's Prize-winning *May We Be Forgiven*, *Days of Awe* is a major new addition to her body of visionary, fearless, outrageously funny work.

Days of Awe: Stories Details

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From Reader Review Days of Awe: Stories for online ebook

Martie Nees Record says

Genre: Literary Fiction

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If you want a razor sharp look into the absurdities of present-day life that will force you to admit your own ego issues, then this is your book. But be prepared: some of it may be difficult to interpret. This short story collection is penned by the author A.M. Homes. Homes is known for her controversial novels and unusual short stories. She has received numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship. This is literary fiction and not a beach read. Although this genre is usually harder to read, I still enjoy it. Still, frankly, it is not the genre that makes this book difficult. It is that some of the stories are incoherent. One of my favorite authors, Roxane Gay, wrote on Goodreads, "I am a fan of Homes... This just wasn't the collection for me." I get Gay's words since I loved Homes' dark comedy, "May We Be Forgiven," but I had trouble with this book. In fact, there are only two stories in the collection that I enjoyed: "Brother On Sunday" and "The National Cage Bird Show."

In "Brother On Sunday" we meet two male siblings and observe their contentious relationship. One brother is single and rather obnoxious. He is the type of guy who dates women half his age to wear as arm candy. Every Sunday, this brother visits his married brother and his wife, along with the couple's friends at the beach. However, the story is not really about the brothers, it is actually about how plastic we all have become: in our physical appearance as well as in our personalities. The married brother is a doctor who deals in vanity. Eh, you know what I mean, the sort of doctor that gives botox injections and facial fillers. The group's beach talk is about the agony one goes through to starve oneself thin. That horrible feeling one gets when they realize that their thighs begin to dimple. And God help us all, the inevitable telltale of age: sagging of skin. In many ways, this story reminded me of the nonliterary novel, "You Think It, I'll Say It." By the end of "Brother," the reader discovers that it's not only the single brother who is obnoxious, but rather all the characters are hard to like.

It is harder to follow than "Brothers," but I did enjoy "The National Cage Bird Show," a story told entirely through messages in a chat room for bird owners. The main protagonists are a teenage girl and a grown man who is in the army and stationed overseas. Thank goodness there is nothing sexual in their chats. The man is trying to cheer up the girl because when her mom meets her in the emergency room after she is in a car accident her mother's first words imply that her daughter's face is now ruined. The mother's words pretty much sum up the book's nods to the over-the-top importance of beauty in today's society. But there are many other topics in this chat room, and some conversations are as sweet as they are bizarre, making me chuckle. Think a couple of old women seriously discussing the importance of which brand of bird feed one uses.

I am afraid the other ten stories lost my interest. I admit just skimming them making me wonder that if I had put in more effort I might have found something to like in the whole collection. But, most reviewers know not to waste time reading something you have lost interest in. I agree with the author, Sara Nelson, "So Many Books, So Little Time" Yet, I still encourage you to read the book because the author has once said about her books, "I write the things we don't want to say out loud." And, that is a very admirable trait.

I received this Advance Review Copy (ARC) novel from the publisher at no cost in exchange for an honest

review.

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Kasa Cotugno says

The eponymous first story is definitely the strongest, which is a shame. It showed what was possible. Also reminded me of the days when you'd buy an entire 33 1/3 LP on the strength of one song. A. M. Homes is a proven, talented, award-winning writer with a large following, but after reading several of her works, I find her novels more successful than her short fiction. They seemed unable to get off the ground.

Dirk H says

Het ene verhaal is geweldig, en bij het volgende vraag je je af hoe je de tijd die je aan het lezen besteed hebt ooit nog terug krijgt. Favoriet: De laatste keer dat het fijn was.

Karen LeBlanc says

In an interview with The Guardian, author A.M. Homes once said of her work, "What I'm doing, which sometimes makes people uncomfortable, is saying the things we don't want to say out loud." Her latest novel, Days of Awe, a short story collection, makes the reader fidget and wince at uncomfortable prose that gets under your skin and characters who simultaneously invoke sympathy and revulsion.

Reading each of these stories, I immediately transported myself into the scenes that the author writes so vividly with concrete sensory details that hint at suppressed hurts, desires and unresolved conflicts, the stuff that defines our past and shapes our present. I highly recommend Days of Awe by A.M. Homes for its provocative characters and raw experiences that reveal the foibles of humanity

Sara says

An uneven collection but goddamn that title story

Stef Smulders says

In haar verantwoording schrijft AM Homes dat deze bundel verhalen zeer langzaam tot stand gekomen is. Dit lijkt te suggereren dat ze nogal met de materie geworsteld heeft. In ieder geval was het lezen van de verhalen voor mij een tamelijk moeizame ervaring. Misschien vindt dit zijn oorzaak wel in de ontstaansgeschiedenis van de bundel. Je kunt een verhaal te snel afronden maar je kunt er ook te lang over doen. Van heel veel sleutelen wordt een verhaal niet per sé beter.

Het belangrijkste bezwaar dat ik bij lezen had, was de erg wisselende kwaliteit van het geschrevene. Goede, een enkele keer zeer goede, beschrijvingen laat de auteur nogal eens volgen door veel mindere passages. Zo eindigt het onderhoudende openingsverhaal Broer op zondag met een kleuterachtige vechtpartij tussen de broers die het verhaal verpest. Lukte het de schrijfster niet om een goed einde te verzinnen en heeft ze er na lang piekeren dit maar van gemaakt?

De langere verhalen in de bundel, waaronder het titelverhaal, zeuren te lang door. Als lezer verlies ik de draad, weet niet meer waar het verhaal over gaat en geef ik het op. Er zijn twee verhalen met dezelfde personages, Hallo allemaal en Ontsnapt. Hier bestaat Homes het om een paar beschrijvingen uit het eerste verhaal letterlijk te laten terugkomen in het tweede, zonder dat daar een reden voor is. In het eerste verhaal verandert een redelijk geloofwaardige dialoog opeens zo van toon dat het lijkt of het een gesprek tussen twee robots betreft. Ook heeft de auteur nogal eens de neiging om achtergrondinformatie voor de lezer in een dialoog te verwerken, zodat de personages elkaar vertellen wat ze allebei allang weten. Heel knullig.

Het is me niet gelukt om me bij deze verhalen ook maar enigszins betrokken te voelen. Merkwaardig genoeg hebben twee verhalen een vergelijkbare setting en thematiek als twee verhalen van de Britse schrijfster en Booker-prize winnaar Penelope Lively: respectievelijk een familie- en vriendenbijeenkomst en een congresbezoek. Vergeleken bij de pogingen van Homes zijn de versies van Lively een wonder van vertelkunst: onderhoudend, humoristisch en vlot geschreven. Misschien kan de uitgever een volgende keer eens voor de verhalenbundel van deze auteur kiezen als er een vertaling komen moet?

Britt says

Sommige gevaarlijk realistisch, andere met iets meer fantasie en magie, maar allemaal even relevant en modern. Benieuwd naar meer van deze schrijfster!

Leo Robertson says

How to write an AM Homes short story:

- Come up with a central conflict of two characters, foils to one another
- Make them come together somehow
- Introduce a third and fourth conflict. Then a fifth and sixth!
- Send characters flailing all over the world
- Forget your point
- Sum it up by using a central image that appeared in the first scene. "She looked in the mirror for the second time that week."

- Pretend that's as good as having a point.

Michelle says

What I loved most about this collection of stories was the variety between stories. Certainly some stories had similar themes, tones, and feels, but there were also some strange stories worked in there too that I found refreshing in their own way.

My favorite stories were Brother Sunday, Days of Awe, Hello Everybody, All Is Good Except For the Rain, Your Mother Was a Fish, A Prize for Every Player, and She Got Away. I enjoyed how certain themes were threaded through the stories.

I noticed that many stories focused on the idea of saying goodbye to parents when you are older. Many of the characters are deeply connected to their parents and have anxieties about their aging and leaving them. A few stories centered around the idea of the inability to say no when a character didn't want to do something. Other themes I found throughout were questioning of characters sexuality, pistachios dyed red (this was random but popped up in two stories), and the storing/collecting/coveting of objects.

I found Homes writing in this collection to be especially reminiscent of Don DeLillo at moments. She writes these wonderful characters who are so wholly American and explores the sadness of modern American life through these characters. The stories are quite dialogue driven, which was challenging at points, but made you feel like you were right there listening in on conversations.

Michael says

I was disappointed. I love Homes. I didn't like this book.

Nelleke Groot says

Dit boek kan ik niet in een keer bevatten en dat is iets positiefs. Ik wil het direct nog eens lezen en ik weet zeker dat ik dan weer andere dingen tegen kom, de verhalen anders beleef. Deze verhalen zitten vol ironie en zwarte humor. Soms zijn de situaties herkenbaar, maar zo uitvergroot dat je er ongemakkelijk van wordt, dan weer heel realistisch en pijnlijk. Dit boek laat je nadenken over jezelf door allerlei verschillende karakters op te voeren. Zonder twijfel vijf sterren.

Caroline says

When Alice Munro won the Nobel, her editor described her prose as untouchable – as in, needing no touch. It's a perilous detail, but Treisman coined a term the rest of us can use: 'the Munrobian step', to describe the annihilating plot shifts Munro pairs with the ability to "gently carry us forward, through the revelation, through the surprise or shock of it, to some kind of understanding, some acceptance, whether rueful or joyful."

I'd read Munro as a master of small violence, but it *is* that gentleness I love. Holmes's title story works on that same softness, the kind you see only in relief:

"She pushes him off, laughing, "Erike, put that away. You're like you've got pickes in your keppe. We're in public."

Reluctantly, he zips up. I'll tell you something about genocides that people don't talk about."

She waits.

"They fucked a lot. They fucked all the time, because they needed the relief, they needed not to think for a brief moment, needed to remind themselves that they were human, and because they knew they were going to die."

And if Anne Fadiman argued for reading books where they took place, my plea is for reading in platonic sororities. Read Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West at the same time. Or Nabokov and Edmund Wilson. You can tell, quickly, which lines would have thrilled their friend. Holmes's prose shares so much with Grace Paley, her former teacher – and this is worth proximity to them.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I was unaware of A.M. Homes' new story collection until I listened to an interview of her on KCRW Bookworm, but it made me request it immediately. I listened to the interview again after finishing because I like hearing her perspective on her own stories. Apparently some of them are based on a character from her first book of stories, *The Safety of Objects* (the character of Cheryl in this collection.)

First of all, the title story is my favorite, about two academics who have a long history hooking up at a Genocide(S) conference. I also love some of the shorter, tighter stories like "Be Mine."

But the two stories with Cheryl, that really seem to give Homes a chance to say what she REALLY feels about Los Angeles, are probably the most memorable. Where people have to wear sunglasses because everyone and everything is too bright. Where nobody is sure who they really are because they've spent so much energy altering their appearance. Where people have to go to foam restaurants while they're still surviving their limited-calorie diets. And it's not that unusual for someone to just... die... because they've been starving themselves. Nobody seems that upset or surprised when this happens.

This is probably a 3.5 star read, rounded up because I enjoyed almost everything (I skipped the bird chatroom one, which I just couldn't get through.) But if I were to recommend a Homes book, it wouldn't be starting here. Maybe *May We Be Forgiven*.

Matthew says

We've all got our quirks (I have countless amounts); they're what distinguish us, make us human. Normalcy, on its surface, is nothing more than a disguise for peculiarities, an anxiety mask many of us adorn on a daily basis. And yet when stripped away and presented starkly naked are we truly ourselves, idiosyncrasies and all.

The characters presented in the stories that make up A.M. Homes's latest collection, the fascinating *Days of Awe*, are just like anyone else: anxious, uneasy, quirky. Above all they're, in a sense, ordinary; that is until

Homes, with her trademark irreverence and razor-sharp wit, transforms them into the extraordinary.

In “A Prize for Every Player” we meet a father who turns his family’s weekly shopping excursion into a game to make it appear more than just a simple trip to the store. It’s a clever little twist on consumerism that becomes more absurd towards the end; soon the family is discovering abandoned children, inspiring the father to voice his opinions that result in his being nominated for President. The title story and “All is Good Except for the Rain” explore human connection intimacies (in fact most of the stories in this collection do); each story brings together duos that have known one another for years yet finally let their guards down, reveal their true selves. And in “Hello Everybody” and “She Got Away” Homes presents a satirical version of Los Angeles, one that’s even more superficial and vapid than it already is; as outlandish as some of the behavior the characters in these two stories demonstrate, it’s impossible not to consider – and be frightened by – its feasibility.

There are a few clunkers in Days of Awe, however. Two of the shorter offerings – “Whose Story Is It, and Why Is It Always on Her Mind?” and “Your Mother Was a Fish” – are brought down by their brevity, neither truly taking shape; they’re far better in theory than execution. “The National Bird Cage Show” also fails in its execution, presenting a chat room environment that attempts to go beyond the topic of interest to reveal characters’ true selves. The results are messy, if not forced.

That said Days of Awe is altogether a triumph, the work of a supremely confident, daring writer who’s not afraid to push the boundaries, unsettle audiences. I felt Homes’s previous novel – the all but universally acclaimed May We Be Forgiven – strayed away from the clever absurdity of her previous works (most specifically This Book Will Save Your Life, a delightful oddity). This collection acts as a return to form for the most part. I can only hope Homes continues to revisit what she so poignantly observes and reveals us for the weirdoes we truly are.

Roxane says

I loved loved loved May We Be Forgiven and am a fan of Homes. This just wasn't the collection for me. Many of the stories are very dialogue driven which is fine. The dialogue is sharp and clever and maybe that's the problem. At times, everything feels just too clever. For sure, I read the whole book and felt like I learned something from reading these stories, but I can't say that I loved most of the stories or would want to read them again. The narrative voice felt too similar from one story to the next and many of the stories are deeply, deeply strange. That's not a bad thing! It's just an observation. The title story, Days of Awe, is the story I loved--so smart and nuanced and sly--a real showstopper. So, this is a very good book of short stories. It's me, not the book on this one.
