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Home Fire: A Novel



Synopsis

“Ingenious” Builds to one of the most memorable final scenes I’ve read in a novel this century. •The New York Times LONGLISTED FOR THE 2017 MAN BOOKER PRIZE The suspenseful and heartbreaking story of an immigrant family driven to pit love against loyalty, with devastating consequences Isma is free. After years of watching out for her younger siblings in the wake of their mother’s death, she’s accepted an invitation from a mentor in America that allows her to resume a dream long deferred. But she can’t stop worrying about Aneeka, her beautiful, headstrong sister back in London, or their brother, Parvaiz, who’s disappeared in pursuit of his own dream, to prove himself to the dark legacy of the jihadist father he never knew. When he resurfaces half a globe away, Isma’s worst fears are confirmed. Then Eamonn enters the sisters’ lives. Son of a powerful political figure, he has his own birthright to live up to or defy. Is he to be a chance at love? The means of Parvaiz’s salvation? Suddenly, two families’ fates are inextricably, devastatingly entwined, in this searing novel that asks: What sacrifices will we make in the name of love?

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Customer Reviews

Home Fire is that rare beast: a novel with really important points to make while also being a cracking read. Through the eyes of five characters, we get a dissection of what it means to be British-Asian in the current world. Initially, we meet Isma, resuming a career in academia in the US after bringing up her orphaned younger siblings in London. Picking up her former life does not start well as she is detained by security at Heathrow Airport and misses her flight. Then we meet Eamonn, the son of the British Home Secretary [insert name]. His father, as a Muslim politician, is keen to distance himself from extremism by introducing ever-more draconian laws to contain the "threat". Eamonn is a spoilt rich kid who finds contact with other British Pakistanis way more confronting than mixing with the white, public school elite. Then, the high point for me, we travel with Parvaiz, Isma's younger brother, to Raqqa to join the Caliphate. This is a portrait of hope, naivety and a desperation to belong to a family, shattered to smithereens when reality bites. But thanks to modern anti-terror laws, there is no way back from such a decision. In very few words, Shamsie created a living, breathing world and a highly conflicted character who goes on a major journey of self-discovery. Then back to Britain with Parvaiz's twin sister Aneeka, and the final two chapters in the company of the Home Secretary himself, Karamat Lone. Lone is a monster, a self-serving egotist who has no understanding of - and even less care about - the impact of his policies on those affected by them. Even when they touch his own family, he is willing to sacrifice their rights for his own political career. And what is the point of that career - the power - if he only uses it to try to perpetuate it? Home Fire is, apparently, a modern day Antigone. But I think that does the novel a disservice. This is not a recasting of an ancient Greek play; it is not derivative. It is a searing critique of the conflicts of identity; of personal interest and family loyalty within a community that is being vilified on a daily basis. How far can it be right to punish an easily identifiable group for the transgressions of some of its members; how far should those who do transgress be dealt with through the existing judicial system or how far can it be right to expel them from the system altogether. This novel spans half the globe, offers five very different stories, and poses difficult questions. There is not a wrong word in this tight narrative, spanning ultra-realism through to the absolutely surreal. By the end, the story is in a slow motion, dream-like sequence. And the ending is absolutely not expected. Home Fire is a really fantastic novel but, if it has one Achilles Heel, it could be its fixation in the present moment. The novel relies on the current

public mood, the current legal (and illegal) situation, the current conflict in Syria. Move on five years and perhaps less and what seems to immediate now may seem very fleeting and out of date. I hope the future is not as bleak as Home Fire would have us believe.

Well written, thought provoking and insightful.

A brilliant book. Courageous, insightful, thought-provoking. Kudos to the author for creating a compelling plot with intelligent prose that successfully touches readers' souls.

One of the most moving and profound books I have ever read.

Great read.

About 40% into this book I was so excited about getting to the end...so I could trash it on . A Man Booker long listed book, Home Fire won't make it to the short list I guarantee. This book is on the Man Booker list for it's trendy subject alone. The plot is awkward and clunky, the writing without a hint of poetic sensibility. Looking for insights? None. Although not alone in this sense, Home Fire demeans the MB prize. MB is a literary prize, but there is nothing literary about HF. Looking for a worthy MB candidate? Try History of Wolves.

Home Fire, Kamila Shamsie, author; Tania Rodrigues, narrator
When I turned the last page of the book I was struck dumb. I didn't expect the ending, and I highly recommend that no one attempt to read the ending before they begin. Don't peek, I implore you! The story plays out logically and clearly, and at the end, it will make the reader question his/her views on immigration, terrorism, Muslims, and also the government, with its regulations and its representatives with regard to all those issues. Most likely, the reader will bounce back and forth, for and against each idea as the story unfolds. When it begins, the reader meets Isma Pasha, the caregiver of her twin siblings, Aneeka and Parvaiz; she is living in England. She is thoughtful and reserved, observes the ritual of prayer, though not five times a day, and wears a hijab, but is not extreme in her views. She is careful about how she expresses herself because of her father's past. He was a known jihadist. When her twin siblings were orphaned, at age 12, she, almost 19, put her life on hold and stepped in to care for them. Now that they are 19, she would like to continue living her own life. When she is given the opportunity, by a former

teacher, Dr. Hira Shah, to study at Amherst University, in Massachusetts, she grabs it. There she meets Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary in England, Karamat Lone. She becomes enamored with Eamonn, but it is unrequited love because Eamonn considers himself like her brother. However, he does become interested in her sister after seeing her photo. Aneeka is beautiful. When Isma made her decision to leave Wembley for America, it portended great changes for the twins, but they seemed to take the news well, with Parvaiz showing a bit more concern about it. He did not want to move out of his home to live with his Aunt Naseem. Feeling more abandoned than his sister, who can already taste the greater freedom she will have, his personality begins to change. He becomes more secretive and reticent. He meets and becomes completely entranced by Farook who becomes a father figure of sorts as he twists Parvaiz's mind into thinking that he too should leave Wembley, but not for the purpose of study like his sister. When Farook tells him that men should be in charge of women, Parvaiz likes the idea. He believes his life is suddenly coming apart due to the actions of his sisters. He is an innocent who is unsuccessful academically, under employed and very naïve; when Farook lionizes Adil Pasha, Parvaiz's father, for his jihadism, he is easily seduced. Farook convinces him to leave England for Syria and to join him in his fight for the Caliphate. Aneeka wears a hijab and prays, is a free spirit and much more outgoing and modern than her quieter, modest sister. She seems quick to judge and is impulsive, expecting to get her way because of her beauty. When she learns that her sister has betrayed her brother, reporting him to the authorities, they become estranged. She becomes very involved with the same Eamonn her sister knew. Does she have an ulterior motive, or is it a true made in heaven romance? The twins' relationship is very close, something I can completely understand. As a twin, I can relate to the special bond that exists, the special loyalty that embraces the siblings. Twins have a unique connection and the absence of one often makes the remaining one feel incomplete. I can identify with Aneeka's unconditional devotion to Parvaiz. At 19, Isma felt forced to make very different choices than her siblings did at the same age of 19, and as her mother did as a young woman when she married Adil Pasha who became a warrior for the Caliphate. Throughout the narrative, there is a thread about the travails of being "other" in a country. They are Asians of Pakistani origin; their skin color, religious practice and relationship to terrorism and terrorists affects their behavior everyday. They feel like outsiders. They have to be more careful than most, careful not to create suspicion by doing anything another would not even give a second thought. Their "Britishness" is questioned, as is their loyalty. Any relationship by anyone with a terrorist is scrutinized, recorded and monitored. Although the twins never knew their

father, since he left their mother before they were born, the stigma of his terrorism follows them also, and leaves its mark on them, their relatives and their future prospects. It vaguely reminded me of what happens in Israel when generations are punished for the behavior of one miscreant. Families become collateral damage. Is that necessary or just? The book highlights the cycle of mistrust and violence that exists in this age of terrorism, in this age of Islamic extremism. America is perhaps, among other things, hated for its tactics in fighting the radicals, for its black op sites, for Guantanamo; Britain is perhaps despised for its welcoming of them and then its attempt to control them. Pakistan seems to encourage them by doing nothing to mitigate the extremism and may actually seem to be allowing it to fester. In the book, the feeling imparted is that the jihadists feel rejected and abused by their host countries. None of them seems to feel any remorse or take responsibility for their own brutality. They are defiant, feel they are justified in their fight and feel outrage about the way they are treated when they are caught. Those that might repent have no way back, no way to escape the heinous battle they have joined. The cruel examples of radical Muslim behavior, like their treatment of women, even leaving them to die because they are uncovered and must wait for women to come to their rescue, or the practice of crucifixion, beheading, torture, and rape, are varied and many. It is hard to know, sometimes, on which side to come down regarding one's sympathy in each specific instance, but the viciousness of the followers of this strict Koranic interpretation cannot but help sway the reader's judgment in one direction or another. When the book begins, we witness the humiliation of Isma, because of her family history of terrorism, even though she is quite innocent. When it ends, we witness the result of the hard line responses to the problem of a hard line interpretation of a religious belief, and once again, we witness the suffering of those who are quite innocent because of a fear which is at times rational and at other times irrational, and that promotes tragic results. Two parents make choices which will follow them for generations. There was the Muslim family and the Christian family, the poor side of society and the wealthy side of society, the clash of cultures and beliefs that caused the apprehension, or perhaps panic, that may or may not have been justified at times; but the misunderstandings, by so many, I were pervasive all the time. I enjoyed the audio but found that sometimes the narrator failed to delineate characters engaged in conversation. They sounded alike and it was difficult to determine who was speaking. Although this is a retelling of the Greek tragedy, the story of Antigone, by Sophocles, one does not have to know the classic to fully appreciate the novel. There are many common threads and questions arising in the story that make for great discussion. 1-Aneeka easily seduces Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary. One has to wonder about her reasons. Are they selfish, matters of the heart, or perhaps even vengeance because of

Isma's part in the trouble Parvaiz now faces.2-Meanwhile, when Parvaiz is seduced by Farook, what is it that makes him such easy prey?3-Adil Pasha, the jihad, fought to establish the Caliphate. He was a devout Muslim. Did his folly infect his family into the future? What about the Home Secretary's actions? "Were the sins of the father visited upon the sons?"4-The Home Secretary renounced his Moslem religion to fit in. He believed "outsiders" should make themselves less different in order to be successful. Why did he believe it was necessary to do this?5--Should Isma have been so thoroughly demoralized, scrutinized and humiliated at the airport because of family history when she tried to travel to America? She had not committed any crime, and her behavior was always exemplary. Where should the line be drawn between suspect and innocent victim?6-Did personal animus play a part in every decision each character made? Was their intellect sidelined by the influence of their past and their conflicting emotions?7-Did continued stubborn adherence to rules without the ability to bend them when necessary bring about tragedy?8-Each character made what they thought was a good choice, but it turned out otherwise. If we compare the choices of Isma, Aneeka, Parvaiz, Eamonn, Adil, and Karamat, are any of them appropriate and what makes them so?9-If someone makes a terrible choice, as in jihadism, should there be no avenue for forgiveness when the error of that choice is recognized? Is there no hope for redemption, for forgiveness? Can that person ever be trusted again?10-Was there one point in the narrative that foreshadowed the events or was the catalyst leading to all others?

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