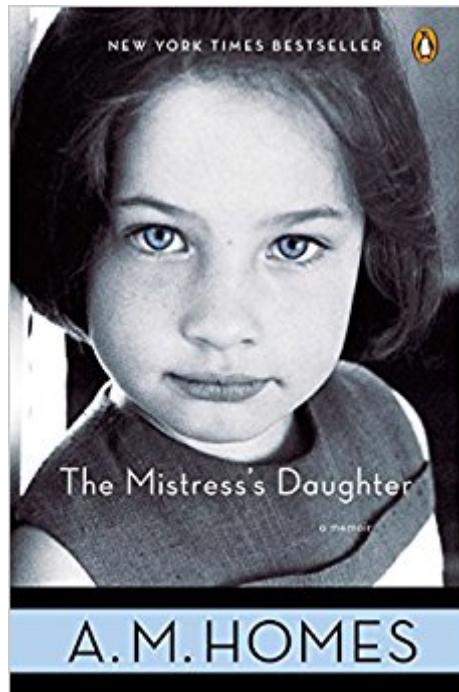


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# The Mistress's Daughter: A Memoir



## **Synopsis**

The "fierce and eloquent" (New York Times) memoir by the award-winning author of *May We Be Forgiven* and *This Book Will Save Your Life* The acclaimed writer A. M. Homes was given up for adoption before she was born. Her biological mother was a twenty-two-year-old single woman who was having an affair with a much older married man with a family of his own. *The Mistress's Daughter* is the ruthlessly honest account of what happened when, thirty years later, her birth parents came looking for her. Homes relates how they initially made contact and what happened afterwards, and digs through the family history of both sets of her parents in a twenty-first-century electronic search for self. Daring, heartbreaking, and startlingly funny, Homes's memoir is a brave and profoundly moving consideration of identity and family. "A compelling, devastating, and furiously good book written with an honesty few of us would risk." —Zadie Smith "I fell in love with it from the first page and read compulsively to the end." —Amy Tan

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is not the first memoir written by a privileged New York writer who despite having much to be

grateful for seems to think they are a victim, instead of like most humans guilty of the occasional lapse of judgement that they hopefully learn from. The author is adopted at 3 days of age by a seemingly loving Jewish family. Her sole childhood complaint seems to be that her mother refused to celebrate Christmas. In her early 40s, her mentally unstable birth mother contacts her, leading to contact with her very narcissistic and unloving father. She has a series of unsatisfactory contacts with both birth parents. The long and unsatisfying contact is a little confusing: is she hoping she misjudged them and that they will improve on acquaintance? Or is she hoping to get something from them: as a writer- a story, or some financial benefit? She seems does not seem to use this time to learn much about their family history, although years later she hires researchers and explores both her adoptive family and her birth families' roots. Both parents seem pretty appalling; she is unbelievably lucky she wasn't raised by these people! The only value this memoir serves is as a cautionary tale that could help those wishing to know their parents have realistic expectations, and could warn them to protect themselves.

First part is good.

Ok could have been a little more about her younger self

I could understand the writers need to express her feelings about her birth parents but reading the book was a boring experience. I would not recommend his book.

Seems once the initial premise was stated in drug on.....

Boring

This is my first book by A.M. Homes. I was drawn to it because of her story of being adopted and her biological mom finally reaching out to contact her. The book opens with the author coming home for a visit in 1992 (a grown adult), and receiving the news from her parents that her biological mom wants to contact her. Through letters, then phone calls, she ends up meeting her biological dad first because her bio mom turns out to be a psychopath (my words - though her bio dad doesn't fair much better). I feel badly for the author because as an adopted child you romanticize your biological parents and believe them to be so much more than they'll ever be in actual life. When the author finally meets her parents (separately) it's a big let down, not just a let down, but seemingly more

trouble than it's worth (at least from what I got from the story). The author is not a very uplifting author filled with happy prose, she obviously sounds depressed, sarcastic, and sad about the ordeal. Still, she does find humor to deal with what most certainly would be a let down to anyone, and at times I found myself laughing out loud. The book is divided into Book One (about 106 pages of her contacting and meeting her bio parents and . . . I won't spoil it for the reader). And Book Two, 139 pages of her uncovering the mystery of who her bio family really was/is. And then circling back to the importance of her adoptive grandmother. I was really taken by this book. It's written in a very quick, matter-of-fact, hit the ground running pace. It's easy to read in a day or two. I was however disappointed and almost annoyed with the genealogy. I could have skipped about 40 pages of genealogical research that's really only important to the author and could have been condense for the reader. Though I can see where it might be useful to people who are looking into how to research your family. I was also disappointed with the whole DNA thing. Her bio dad and her take a DNA test to prove their related. The dad doesn't actually share the real results but tells her. But he's really an a\*& and doesn't introduce her to the family like he promised, and only wants to meet her at hotels and in secret. So the author cuts ties until she need the DNA test results so she can join the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). The DNA test results were taken more than 10 years ago so she can't request a copy, so she has her lawyer contact her bio dad and he refuses to give her a copy of the official document. For the reader, already having trudged through the genealogy of her family and hoping to be rewarded with something which brings us back to the original story, we are left hanging. Not only do we not find out if she gets the test results from a guy we've only come to despise, but then she breaks into an imaginative episode of LA Law where she ponders the questions her father would be asked (questions she would like to ask) had her bio dad been taken to court to get the test results. Well written, but a tease. What really happened? Did she let it go? Did she take him to court? And then rather than give us a nice conclusion the author deviates to tell us about her adoptive grandmother. I did enjoy this last chapter, but the book really did not flow very well, like reading essays rather than a full book. I'm not disappointed I read this book, the writing is good and it tells a story worth reading, it just doesn't flow well and there's much left out and much put in that could have been left out.

This is an absorbing memoir concerning Author, A. M. Homes' adoption in December 1961. Homes knew of her adoption; however, in 1992, her biological mother, Ellen Ballman, through her attorney, requested they meet. A surprised and disbelieving Homes, requested they correspond. She wanted information about Ellen and her biological father, Norman Hecht. Surprisingly, Hecht

lived less than a mile away from where Homes grew up, in an exclusive neighborhood, outside of Washington, D.C. At one time, Ellen had a residence near Homes too, which was vacant. Ellen had moved to Atlantic City. Homes learned that her parents met when Ellen, a fifteen-year-old, Catholic school student, worked at Hecht's dress shop, one day during the week and, on weekends. A relationship ensued. Hecht was thirty-two, and married with three children. At twenty-two, Ellen became pregnant. She had not completed high school, and seemed incapable of caring for an infant. Ellen's deceased father was Jewish, so she requested placement of her baby in a good Jewish home. In her letters, Ellen seemed pushy and frequently badgered Homes to meet with her. Homes declined. Homes had not shared her phone number and address in New York City. Ellen discovered her residence and number and in January 1994, they met in New York City. However, with Hecht, who appeared to have a smooth, suave demeanor, Homes agreed to meet with him numerous times, in hotel lobbies. He discussed his background with pride, and suggested, with his pedigree, she could join DAR—the Daughters of the American Revolution. Homes wanted to please her father, wanted his acceptance. Unfortunately, when Hecht made derogatory remarks concerning Ellen as a teen, and said he had introduced his then ten-year-old son to Ellen during their affair, Homes did not see a red flag concerning his unconscionable conduct. However, she felt somewhat disturbed when he requested a DNA test. She complied. The test proved 99.9 percent positive. Later, she discovered a wealth of interesting information about her ancestry. There is sometimes dry humor in Homes' delivery when describing her biological parents. Yet, often there are tragic situations presented with a suave, nattily dressed, Norman not being forthright in informing his adult children of Homes' existence, yet, introducing Homes to his wife, whom he later commented didn't like Homes. Ellen was middle-aged, lonely, needy, and depressed. Ellen had never married. She had grown up in the fifties at a time when pregnancy, without marriage, was unthinkable. I am sure Ellen grieved for Homes, just as Homes' adoptive mother grieved when she lost a son six months prior to adopting Homes. Ellen had to accept feelings of exclusion when pregnant, and again, when at age thirty-one, her daughter could not share her life with her. Homes wanted acceptance from Hecht, and his wife, and children's acknowledgement. Ellen wanted Homes' acceptance and love. No one needed it more than she did. Homes is a sensitive, imaginative, and creative writer. I gave *The Mistress's Daughter* four stars. I believe the book dragged on too long with Homes' deposition.

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