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On a road crew in California, a former colonel in the Iranian Air Force sees a way to restore his family's dignity in an attractive bungalow available on county auction. But the house's owner, a recovering alcoholic and addict down on her luck, will fight for the one thing she has left. And her lover, a married cop, will be driven to extremes to win her love. In this masterpiece of American realism and Shakespearean consequence, Andre Dubus III's unforgettable characters careen toward inevitable conflict, their tragedy painting a shockingly true picture of the country we live in today.

House of Sand and Fog Details


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From Reader Review House of Sand and Fog for online ebook

Teresa says

There is nothing really wrong with this book. It's well-written, psychologically astute with distinct voices for the different narrators who are desperate, needy and proud. It is appropriately heart-wrenching at the most critical point in the story. Having said all that, maybe I should give it 5, or at least 4, stars, but I found that it isn't my kind of story in a way that I'm not sure I can explain. Perhaps it's because it's like watching a car wreck, or people on a so-called reality show. While many use the car-wreck analogy to mean they can't turn away, I never have trouble averting my eyes or changing the channel. So I can only say that while I admire the book and I guess I 'like' it, I don't 'really' like it.

David says

Too many paragraphs like "Around noon, I picked up my mail at the post office, then went to a shopping center sandwich shop to sift through it all while I ate. It was only ten days' worth but it took up all of my table, and I put it in two piles, one for the trash can on the way out, one to keep. The trash pile was mostly junk mail, the other was bills: car insurance, gas, my final phone, electric. The electric bill was the most recent and I opened it and read the cutoff date for the last billing period: just two days ago. I tore into my turkey sandwich and drank down some Diet Coke, and I shook my head at how fucked-up this was. It was the same with the gas bill."

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4.75* of five

The Publisher Says: On a road crew in California, a former colonel in the Iranian Air Force sees a way to restore his family's dignity in an attractive bungalow available on county auction. But the house's owner, a recovering alcoholic and addict down on her luck, will fight for the one thing she has left. And her lover, a married cop, will be driven to extremes to win her love. In this masterpiece of American realism and Shakespearean consequence, Andre Dubus III's unforgettable characters careen toward inevitable conflict, their tragedy painting a shockingly true picture of the country we live in today.

My Review: Behrani. An exiled colonel in the Shah's army. Kathy. A fucked-up druggie living off her inheritance. Lester. A major idiot whose law-enforcement career is his last best shot at staying off welfare.

Not one of these people will leave this book better than they entered it. Kathy's only home is the one she inherited, and the county says it's not hers anymore because she hasn't paid the taxes. She has, though. She's completely unable to function in the world because she's hazed on drugs for so long that even when she's clean she can't think straight. That means she can't figure out how to prove she has complied with the law.

Behrani can't get an American life going. He has savings (one hesitates to imagine where the money came from originally) that barely keep him afloat, and jobs that demean him but are all a man with no skills except being an Army officer can get. But his son's college money is sufficient to buy a distressed property at auction. Kathy's home, as it turns out. He plans to renovate and flip it, using this as a stepping-stone to American Dream-level prosperity.

Lester comes in as the deputy assigned to be sure Kathy gets out of the home that's no longer hers. Love at first sight! Lame-o Lester and Loser Kathy...surely the white trash Romeo and Juliet!

Pretty much.

Dubus drags us through the legal system as the parties battle out the rights and wrongs of the case. No one here is a good person, just a greedy selfish prick who deserves what, in the end, is meted out to them by the author's just and pitiless exercise of karmic debt collection.

NOT an uplifting book. My withers were wrung about every twenty pages, and I took frequent breaks in order to console myself with excessive liquor consumption and sordid sexual escapades.

I love a book that brings out the best in me.

There's a scene where Lame-o Lester gets his first-ever BJ from Loser Kathy, which Dubus goes into in a bizarrely flat and affectless way that completely desexualizes the act, makes it a symptom of a pathology and not an erotic or intimate or even sexy development. It's just part of the sickness pervading these broken, unfixable people's existences.

Did you *get* that? A man wrote about the thing most men want more than food and only slightly less than air, and made it *unappealing*.

Dubus is a master of his craft. He is an artist. He can do anything he wants with words to make them dance in the reader's head to HIS tune, screw whatever you were expecting, reader! He can fashion a story that, in its outlines, sounds juicy and ripe with conflict, and make it a sharp object that will deflate whatever happy illusions were still in your head about yourself and this Murrikin Dream we're supposed to be having, reader!

And that is why you should read this book.

Jeffrey Keeten says

“And that's what I wanted: obliteration. Decimation. Just an instant smear of me right out of all this rising and falling and nothing changing that feels like living.”

In the beginning there was Kathy Nicolo.

She is an addict who has been through a drug rehabilitation program. She has been flying straight for a while. She cleans houses for a modest living. She spends most of her free time watching movies, one after the other. All is going okay until she has a dispute with the county over the house her father left her and her brother. They claim she owes back taxes. She goes down to the county offices and gets it “sorted out”, but she continues to get letters from the county office which she promptly throws away without opening.

Anybody who has ever dealt with any level of bureaucracy knows that issues are not always “sorted out” the first time. The problem is that Kathy doesn't have much experience dealing with anything. She avoids, evades, and hits the escape hatch any time anything gets too real. The next thing she knows the cops are on her doorstep explaining to her that she has an order to vacate. Her property has been seized.

She meets Deputy Sheriff Lester Burdon as he is escorting her off her property. She can tell by the way he is looking at her that he is attracted to her. She is pretty, waifish, and vulnerable. He has a wife and two kids,

but every time he makes love with his wife it feels like he is making out with his sister. They are best friends, comfortable with each other, and like a lot of people he interprets that to mean the spark is gone from the marriage.

Kathy, as he soon finds out, is much more than a spark. She is more like a full on raging forest fire.

The county sells her property quickly. This is where Colonel Massoud Behrani enters the plot. He and his family were lucky to escape Iran when the Shah is ousted. He was high enough up in the government to see his name appear on the blacklists. His wife has never really forgiven him for the circumstances that have made them immigrants in America. They did escape with some money, but much of that has been eaten up by keeping up appearances with the community of Persians in California. Behrani works two crappy jobs, one picking up trash along the highways and the other as a late night convenience clerk. Both jobs that are difficult to hire Americans to do at any price.

“For our excess we lost everything.”

It is no wonder to me that immigrants excel in the United States. They take chances. They work hard. They don't expect anything for nothing. Behrani is no exception and when Kathy's house comes up for auction he takes the last of their savings and buys the house. As it turns out he is also lucky that only two other bidders show up and he buys the house for a fraction of the value. Now I say lucky, but I always feel we make our own luck. Luck never just happens, you have to give luck a chance to reward you. In his mind he can already see the real estate empire that this first house will help finance.

Kathy and Lester hit it off. *“I felt a little better as I pulled the T-shirt over my head and caught the faint scent of vomit and gun oil. Me and Lester.”* They are screwing like bunnies and when they are together everything is fine, but when they are apart it becomes readily apparent that their relationship is built out of sand. He starts thinking about how easily she fell into bed with him. She starts thinking he is going to go back to his wife and kids.

Kathy really hates the idea of Colonel Behrani and his family in HER house. The county admits it made a mistake, but the sales transaction with Behrani is legal. He would have to agree to sell the house back to the county for what he paid for it.

His visions of a hefty profit float up into the fog.

Kathy isn't adhering to the program. *“And I knew to any of my counselors back East my life wouldn't look very manageable; I was drinking again, and smoking; I was sleeping with a man who'd just left his family, all while I was supposed to be getting back the house I'd somehow lost. I knew they would call the drinking a slip, the smoking a crutch, the love making 'sex as medication,' and the house fiasco a disaster my lack of recovery had invited upon itself, and on me.”* Embracing those addictions is making her unstable world spin faster while her mind spins slower.

It is an unusual situation with all parties being victims of an unresolvable issue with the county. Given what we know about Behrani he isn't who Kathy thinks he is. Kathy isn't really who he thinks she is either. As the plot advances we also find out that Lester isn't who anyone thinks he is either. Of course, Kathy is like nitroglycerin in his head.

It always amazes me how one little mistake can lead to such complete chaos. Andre Dubus III keeps adding snakes to the plot until it is all so twisted together that only the sword of Alexander the Great will untie it. Dubus reveals all the characters, even the second tier characters, with such depth that I felt like I know these people. My mind even now is still weighing all the ramifications from everyone's decisions as if this is an ongoing crisis that is still yet to be resolved.

Andre Dubus has done his homework on this very American novel.

I enjoyed the real estate aspects of the plot. I also liked the way that Dubus has us ride along with each character giving us free access to their inner thoughts, their hopes, and desires. He also shows how many chances people get to turn their life around. The many hands that are outstretched to keep them from falling too far. Sometimes it just doesn't matter how much help someone receives they continue to make the same bad decisions until tragedy overtakes them sometimes with equally tragic results for others.

They made a movie out of this book in 2003. I've not seen the film. I, as usual, skipped the film until I had a chance to read the book. From what I've read about the movie they significantly changed the ending, leaving some very important and pivotal scenes in the book out of the plot of the movie. I'm not discouraged because I know that films are a different entity from the book that inspired them. I will report back after watching the movie.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Joe says

The reason I love this book is because it beautifully presents a problem from two sides, then let's the reader decide which side he or she supports. This isn't foxnews. The author transitions from chapter to chapter between the two main characters, using wonderful language for each, and then lets the reader decide. Neither of the characters were perfect, but neither could be classified as "bad guys". Andre Dubois III is my favorite modern author, his short stories are also amazing.

Tracey says

I'll spare reviewing the entire plot, since I see many posters have done a fine job already.

My thought through this book was that Kathy was responsible for most of the problems in this story. She was the one who ignored the tax notices (having answered them would have fixed the clerical error), she was the one who went to the Iranians home after being told not to by her lawyer, and she didn't stand up to her boyfriend when the situation went completely out of control.

Granted, her entire life was sad and filled with poor choices....the most of which was ignoring her tax notices.

The end was sad and left me depressed, but I thought about it for a few more days. Mostly I just got cranky with Kathy's poor choices and how they rippled out to others.

Mary Gibbons says

The House of Sand and Fog was a book that I had high expectations for. The reviews for this book have been above average, and (which I didn't find out until after I read) it was chosen for Oprah's Book Club. While I typically act high brow towards anything that is touted by the O, she has chosen to like some classics that I have, 'On the Road' being one of them. Though I don't know how the typical Oprah watcher could really get

in to this... that is not the point.

Anyways, back to Dubas' book. I did appreciate his use of the Iranian colonel, a troubled man from a violent regime who is not mentally mature enough to see his own failings. Dubas' shaping of this character is actually poetic, though frustrating for a reader who learns that this negligence of responsibility is realistically in-defeatable in people who have committed human rights horrors. Behrani is never a hero to the reader, or to me, but if weighed against Kathy Nicolo, becomes the moral winner.

I was not at once convinced by Kathy. Her character is so unchanging, so immature, unable to learn from mistake after mistake that you can not like her. But how can she not learn? Behrani shows growth throughout the novel. If anything, Kathy shows a degeneration. I do appreciate the moments of internal struggle she shows, but it is hardly enough to redeem her.

I don't think Dumas took much of a leap with the character development, or the plot development. From the rave reviews I've heard of this book, I was expecting much better. To echo a post I read on GoodReads, this is the equivalent of a Beach Read that doesn't need to be brought to the beach. Little thought needed, easy to flip through, doesn't affect reader. Blah.

Shira Karp says

I loved this book. It was amazing. I never thought I would get so wrapped up in a story where the main character was actually a house (or should I say a "bungalow" as that is how it is mostly referred to in the book). In the first few chapters it seemed obvious who the good guy and who the bad guy in the story were, but I quickly found that line blurred and throughout the whole book I didn't know who to root for, I wanted them both to win. The reason I only gave this book four stars instead of the five it should have deserved was because this book WAS amazing... until it ended. It was possibly the worst, most unsatisfying ending I've ever read. I sat there staring at the book going "That's IT? That's how he's ending the book? Did I get a copy missing the last chapter?" The ending was not worthy of the rest of the book.

Matt says

As a renter with cable television, I had a relatively safe perch from which to view the housing boom and bust in America. From the safety of my beloved armchair, covered in crumbs and clad in sweatpants, I could flip the channels and watch any number of reality shows about ordinary Americans flipping houses. The game was simple. You bought a cheap house, with the abundant available credit, fixed it up, and turned around and sold it. Do it right, and you could pocket a year's worth of salary in six weeks.

Do you remember those days? Back when America's pastime transitioned from baseball to selling houses to one another? I do. I remember it well because I always thought I was missing out on something, just like I'd missed out on the Internet boom/bust and, earlier in my life, the slap-bracelet boom/bust and the Zubaz boom/bust (I'm still waiting for Zubaz to come back around). Of course, I didn't do anything to get in the game. I wouldn't say I was too lazy, it's just that I didn't want to do anything that required me to leave my chair.

Eventually, the housing market collapsed. And with it went all those reality shows about flipping houses.

Why do I mention this? Well, even though *House of Sand and Fog* preceded the start of the housing boom,

it's essentially the story of a house-flip gone horribly wrong. It pits Kathy Nicolo, a recently-divorced former substance abuser, against Massoud Behrani, a former Iranian colonel (he's still Iranian, but no longer a colonel) who now balances two unskilled jobs, in a life-and-death struggle for a California bungalow with an ocean view.

The story starts with Kathy getting wrongfully evicted from her house for failure to pay the county taxes. She is evicted by Deputy Lester Burden, with whom she is soon engaged in a lukewarm affair. Massoud, who has been exiled from his native land, where he was wealthy and powerful, scrapes together the money to buy Kathy's home at auction. His plan is to fix it up, install a widow's walk, and sell it for a big profit. He is motivated to do this in order to recapture the lost wealth and prestige suffered by his family upon coming to America.

That's the set up. Like any good thriller, the stakes and tension rise with each page, until the inevitable collision. To say the least, Andre Dubus' novel holds your attention, and forces you to keep reading, even though you can probably guess that things won't end amicably.

House of Sand and Fog is a genre novel - a contrived culture clash - burnished by Dubus' literary pedigree. The book is structured so as to provide opposing first-person viewpoints: that of Massoud and Kathy. There are also sections told in third-person that focus on Deputy Burden. The two first-person narrators work quite effectively. It gives you deep insight into the main characters, but also avoids the Dickens Effect, a term I've coined to describe first-person narrators that are never very interesting, since they're always only looking out their own eyes. Dubus' framework allows us to be both outside-looking-in and inside-looking-out.

Dubus' strives to find a consistent voice for both Kathy and Massoud. Kathy is the least interesting character in the book. It's hard to see her as anything other than a white-trash whiner. Dubus has far more success with Massoud. Clearly, he did his homework on Persian culture, and crafts a fully-realized man with a rich and complex history.

Earlier there was fog, but now the sky is the color of peaches and the sun is low over the ocean I cannot yet see from our home. The najars have for two hours been gone. Before leaving, they cleaned up the area well, covering the new lumber with a large green canvas they weighted with old wood from the roof. I sit upon the front step and view my son using the rake to gather the cut grass in the yard. He wears what is called a tank shirt, and short pants which are quite loose, and I see the long muscles beginning to show in his arms and legs, his shoulders as well...

House of Sand and Fog is fine for what it is: a quick, detail-oriented, better-written-than-normal thriller (and by "thriller", I mean a story that, by its nature, ends ludicrously). Yet from its title, to the cover, to its repeated mentions of fog, you are knocked over the head with the novel's literary pretensions. Indeed, it was a National Book Award finalist. My praise certainly does not go that high.

A book like this suffers from the snowball effect. You know, when a snowball starts rolling down a mountain, until it becomes a big snow-boulder (like the kind you see in cartoons that run down an anthropomorphic animal on skies.) At the beginning, in the snowball stage, things are fine and dandy; that is, the drama is tight, believable, relatable. As the snow ball picks up more snow, and gets bigger, the story gets a little shaggy. By the end - the snow boulder stage - when characters are getting into unbelievable situations, and things get a little pulpy, well, that's where I lose interest. Still, it's a good deal of fun getting to that weak ending.

This is a book you'd usually feel guilty about reading - especially because it's been another summer and you still haven't finished *War and Peace* - but you don't feel guilty because it has a leit motif and its written by a guy named Andre.

Marta says

uuuugh i hated this book!!!!!! BUT before i start trashing it, i'll say that there is one thing i liked about it - the author's ability to give two completely different viewpoints and make the reader understand and empathize with them both. all i'll say about the plot is that it's about two people fighting for the ownership of a bungalow (that in itself should have stopped me from picking up this book - boringggggggg). i found myself rooting for each character at different times, for which i give credit to the author. but when i look at the book as whole, i absolutely hated it! first, the characters were put in the most absurd and unrealistic situations, the whole book was soooo unbelievable, i literally had to force myself to finish it. it was really a struggle for me to keep reading, i was so uninterested in the book, the only driving force was my curiosity to find out how the house dispute is resolved. needless to say, the end is so pathetic - but the whole book was a disappointment so i guess i shouldn't have gotten my hopes up. i am planning on seeing the movie tho, just to compare it to the book. as for recommendations, i emphatically DON'T recommend it to anyone, i found it too boring! but if you do read it or have read it before, i'd like to know what you thought.

♥ Emm ♥ says

I have a flippant love-hate about *Sand and Fog*. I've redone this review in its entirety FOUR TIMES now. I hate the ending and last few chapters with a certain hellfire, but the rest of it is so beautiful - written is such intricate, sensitive detail that you can't possibly dislike it, even when the characters derail into illogical extremes. The last chapters, though... they'll kick your soul in the face. The ending is understandable, but why did it have to end like that?

The moral of this story - miscommunication kills. Pride goeth before the fall.

You have these three characters who are broken by their circumstances - Colonel Behrani's fall from a life of grace and luxury, Kathy's loss of her father's house due to a tax error, and Lester's collapsing relationship with his wife and kids. Their argument over this modest house near the beach, starts as somewhat of an annoyance and escalates into a complete volatile breakdown, all because of their pride, and inability to admit when they may have been wrong, or mistaken.

The writing style is like poetry, it might as well be poetry for how beautiful it is. Just don't go into it expecting a lighthearted read. *House of Sand and Fog* is at heart, about very realistic, very human despair and unhappiness that can happen because of a few simple mistakes.

Cathy DuPont says

After finishing *House of Sand and Fog*, I read some reviews on Kindle. Most gave four or five stars but scattered among those were a few one and two stars with comments such as 'the sale of the house could have been prevented, the premise just wasn't plausible and landscape description was wrong.'

The House was the center, the subject and even in the title of the book. The two main characters, an Iranian

military colonel under the Shah who brought his family to America after the fall of the Shah otherwise they would be executed; and a recovering addict (Kathy) whose husband left her. The third main character is a married deputy sheriff who falls in love with Kathy. The characters seem to circle the house as the center of their universe losing sight (or never knowing) what is really important in their life. Eventually they end in the perfect storm. Their storm is due, in part, to "their tragic inability to understand one another" as stated on the back cover. The lack of cultural differences simply makes the lack of understanding even deeper and more profound.

The book is written in the first person by some main characters and although it skips back and fourth, it was not confusing to me at all. Written in the first person gave me a clear picture of what the character was mentally going through. Metaphors weave throughout the book and I found Dubus' writing very skillful.

A book to read when it's bright and sunny because it's not uplifting at all but nevertheless, it is very, very good.

I stand with the five stars on this engrossing book and look forward to reading Dubus' memoir which came out earlier this year.

Jimmy says

Andre Dubus III's second novel, *House of Sand and Fog* was adapted to film in 2003 by a Ukrainian-American director by the name of Vadim Perelman. Luckily, Perelman enlisted the help of Roger Deakins A.S.C., who's really just a wizard behind the camera. Also, Deakins is the man partially responsible for why most of the films by the Coen's look so inimical and striking in that trademark, neo-noir way that they do. He's also quite talented at dancing around landscapes and interiors with his camera in such a way that the characters seem almost like magical wraiths. Kingsley's tactfully understated performance helps a bit, but between an all-too liberal use of fog machines, and an oppressively swelling musical score the film is forced along as an excessive exhibition of charged melodrama, and clichés about the American Dream. Then again, Perelman's adaptation is a fairly literal reenactment of the story.

Details seem fairly important to this particular tale because Dubus III is more or less prodding the reader to come to some sort of moral conclusion. Again, they seem important to the story, but they aren't always terribly consistent. To begin with, there is Kathy Nicolo. What we know about her barely takes up a page; her husband recently left her, they were recovering drug addicts. She's now living in the coastal town of Corona, in a house that was left to her by her father, and she cleans other people's houses in order to make ends-meet. That's about the bulk of the information that the reader is given at the onset. The conflict that begins the story is that the county is auctioning off her house due to delinquent business tax payments because, you know, she's a recovering addict; they never open their mail, right? She's hastily evacuated from her house one foggy morning, and begins to take last-second, desperate legal actions.

Meanwhile, Colonel Mahsoud Behrani, a former SAVAK (S'zem'n-e Ettela't va Amniyat-e Keshvar) - basically the Shah's secret police, a nasty little organization, even by secret organization standards - member who fled to the United States when the Iranian Monarchy was overthrown by Ayatollah Khomeini during the Iranian Revolution in the late 70's. Mr. Behrani has been working on a road crew in the Bay Area, as well as at a convenience store at night. He does this in order to keep up the illusion and appearance that his family is still living as luxuriously as they did in their homeland. Noticing an ad in the paper for an ocean-side bungalow that is being auctioned off at a ridiculously low price, Behrani sees his standard-American-Dream-type opportunity to quit working and manipulate the real-estate market by buying auctioned off homes and selling them at four-times what he originally paid. And really, there's nothing wrong with that ... or is there?

Anyway, he buys it, and quickly begins remodeling it, with the intention of moving in autumn. It's summer, correct?

So, Ms. Nicolo might be a pathetic recovering drug-addict, but it turns out that there is no reason that she should have paid a business tax in the first place, or rather, the county goofed on the exact address; the details in the book get a little hazy. There is another passage that confusingly describes it as a mere \$500 property tax. Regardless, the county had no right to auction off her house, so her lawyer threatens to sue. The county tries to rescind the sale, but it's too late, and Behrani is not budging. He perceives this as a blunder on the part of foolish American bureaucracy, and feels that Ms. Nicolo must take it up with the county. Aware of the fact that he can quadruple his profit by selling it himself, he only agrees to sell it back to her for that amount. Kathy can sue the state, but that will take months, she's living out of her car, and well, she believes that it's still her house.

Taking pity on this hapless female, knight-in-shining-armor Deputy Lester Burdon, the officer that came to Kathy's door on that fateful *foggy* day, has taken a liking to her, despite the fact that he's a father of two and still married. Apparently, he's been waiting for this opportunity for a long time, and this downtrodden, homeless, recovering drug-addict* is exactly the woman he needed to help him realize how much of a domestic zombie he had been all this time. This is where things begin to get really goofy. Kathy has already been making too many visits to the house. Behrani becomes aware of this, turns her away, and obstinately refuses to believe that he should give up the home for what he originally paid. After years of service Burdon suddenly becomes a loose cannon for Ms. Nicolo's sake; one particular visit illustrates his racism (well, you could call it racism, it's hardly that convincing in the book), and the worst possible results occur.

Dubus III takes some liberties with what is an otherwise straightforward narrative; nothing too liberal really. He begins by switching back and forth between the first-person perspectives of Colonel Behrani and Kathy Nicolo. It's clearly an attempt to offer a balanced account of the moral conflict of the story. After part two, he switches to third-person narration, and intermittently returns to Burdon, Behrani, and Nicolo as the tension builds. The prose style is mostly straightforward American realism, nothing too minimal, but nothing terribly nuanced either. Voicing for Behrani, he's probably most at his most compelling as a stylist, but he has a terrible habit of running headlong into mundane details, mostly irrelevant to the story. Many of the log cabin scenes read like lackadaisical journal entries. As he must have felt somewhat awkward, telling part of the story from an Iranian-American point-of-view, he plays it safe, tossing in the occasional stylistic riff, seemingly a result of a sufficient amount of research. The important thing here is that Dubus III does manage to avoid a bias of any specific character's perspective, thus strengthening the conversational aspect of his moral storytelling capabilities.

So then, in the end, is Dubus III suggesting that this is a small story of the complications inherent in pursuing the American Dream? He seems to suggest that it can be profitable for some, and not so much for others; the one's that don't profit. There is also a familiar thematic quality found in the characters of Nicolo and Burdon (who are more or less suggested to be the "bad" guys here) that was noticeable in his first book *The Cage Keeper and Other Stories*, people who could only be described as the relatively well-intentioned in society who sometimes end up falling through the cracks. Usually these people are ex-cons or addicts who realize what they've done wrong, yet who are also seemingly predisposed toward screwing up their lives, no matter how much they enact change, even for brief periods of time. Actually, Dubus III's humanitarian preoccupations seem reminiscent of Hubert Selby Jr. and Flannery O'Connor, in that he shares a similar preoccupation with the obstinacy of human depravity. In the case of certain characters of his, they can't help but continuously fail, and he wants to see them do so; it doesn't seem to hurt that they also manage to bring level-headed or impressionable people down with them.

Culturally speaking, this is a dodgy book. Dubus III had very specific reasons for choosing an ex-SAVAK member as one of his main characters. To add a weak-willed white female character such as Kathy to the story seems to indicate that he is beckoning the reader to make a seriously difficult judgment call concerning

who the villain really is here; whether Ms. Nicolo is simply a weak woman, prone to blaming other people for her own irresponsibility, or whether it's that Behrani is a greedy misogynist; a human relic of an inhumane empire that was trumped by the Iranian peoples' refusal to live in constant fear. It could be that while Kathy doesn't do anything wrong or immoral at the beginning of the story, her proclivity for irresponsible life choices, eventually turns a small mess, into an enormous one. Either that, or substance abuse is to blame, but Dubus III doesn't seem to dwell on that specific issue intensely enough. And there is also the issue of Bahrani's values, which could hardly be described as sympathetic to women; this is apparent in his various descriptions of Kathy throughout the book; the epithet "mother whore" is used quite a bit. He's also been know to physically assault his own wife. Actually, Lester Burdon's character doesn't display much more sympathy for women or human life at all really. But it would hardly be accurate to say that misogyny is the true villain here. And in a very Selbyesque fashion, these three characters become so obsessed with their respective pursuits of happiness, that their purported selflessness is really something of a lie in the end. It's just difficult to tell who Dubus III is siding with, or who's in the right. Not that all novels should have such a morally tight conclusion, but toward the end, the reader can't help but wonder if he is even aware of ever having a specific moral point to begin with.

*Although, a nymphlike Jennifer Connelly plays Kathy in the Perelman film, which makes it a little more convincing.

Margitte says

When the Shah of Iran is ousted and a revolution breaks out in the country, Colonel Massoud Behrani, a former colonel in the Iranian Air Force, and his family, once respected and well-to-do residents in their country, become nothing else but vulnerable immigrants to the United States where the only status left for them is to be called foreigners for the rest of their lives, even though they become full citizens. He works two jobs, as a trash picker along the highways by day, and as a late-night clerk in a distant convenience store. He does it all to keep up appearances, as well as keeping his wife happy in their Iranian community in San Francisco. Actually, he spent most of his money to keep up this appearance for his daughter's sake. To make sure that she will marry the right man. When that happens, he is free to look for cheaper living conditions and save up some money for his son's university fees. He watches the auction notices in the newspapers for houses coming under the hammer.

Kathy Nicolo, a rehabilitating drug and alcohol addict, loses her home by accident. She already lost her husband. Apart from that, she has also lost her self respect and will to succeed in anything, a long time ago. She profiles perfectly. Any strenous event is dealt with the narcotic way, although she has been trying to change her life after rehab and succeeded until now.

Deputy Sheriff Lester Burdon, a married man with two kids, along with the tax agent, is tasked to throw her out of her house. Like two peas in a pod, they connect hormonally and turn their dreary lives into a mutual magical homp-and-romp fantasy with the usual consequences. For the first time Kathy has someone who wants to fight in her corner. But both of them have lost the ability to think with the right brain. Cognitive and hormonal thinking are two very different things after all. The duo decide to get her house back. The house is now owned by Colonel Massoud Behrani ...

What struck me about this book, is the ease and wisdom behind the characters. Dubus gave them souls, as it should be. We can think what we want and stagger from the harsh reality, the spotlight on society, but we cannot deny any human being a right to own a soul and be respected for who they are.

I wanted to dislike this book. It scared me in the sense that this could happen to anyone, including me. It is one of the reason, I suspect, why many readers react negatively to the story. They simply cannot handle the truth and depth of the multiple-levelled situation. The American realism, which does not differ that much from other western countries, are disturbing in the sense that it doesn't reflect a 'what if' situation as much as it portrays the harshness of a truth that can happen to anyone. If you lose your compass and discipline, you lose your way. Things go fast and furiously wrong! It's that simple. But sometimes things happen to you while you're busy making other plans, as John Lennon stated ...

It is a very well written book in every way and on all levels. Absolutely worth the read, and for the first time I actually agree with an Oprah choice! But those readers who have tried her recommendations, already know that she chooses arresting stories with difficult themes. This one is no exception.

Whether we like it or not, this author puts heart and soul back into statistics and left us enlightened but sad in the end. The official blurb states: *In this masterpiece of American realism and Shakespearean consequence, Andre Dubus III's unforgettable characters careen toward inevitable conflict, their tragedy painting a shockingly true picture of the country we live in today.*

I loved this first encounter enough to try this author again.

Nandakishore Varma says

There are certain stories we know are going to end badly: yet we read them. The suspense is unbearable even when we have a shrewd idea what the outcome is going to be: yet we keep on turning the pages. Why? Do we think that after all, we may be mistaken, and all may turn out right? Or is it a masochistic tendency to keep hurting ourselves, and sigh with dejection and despair (laced by a sneaky sense of satisfaction) when the ending is even worse than we expected? I don't know. Yet we do that; and the stories which have the power to make us do so attain the pedestal reserved for great tragic works.

This novel - outlining the doomed and intertwined lives of Behrani, a former colonel in Iran and now struggling to have a life of dignity in the USA; Kathy Nicolo, a pretty young woman given a raw deal by life; and Sheriff Lester Burdon, who falls in love with Kathy against his better judgement - is such a book.

Read it, if you are up to it.

13/02/2017

The current anti-immigrant hysteria going on in US brought this novel to mind, again. This novel is the tragedy of an immigrant who came to enjoy the American Dream.

Shannon says

I have never had such a horribly visceral reaction to a novel. The story unfolded tragically but the writing unraveled something worse. The author only succeeded in presenting two sides of a story equally - I didn't care about either one, or the little abode (widows walk or not).

To torture myself further, I watched the movie. I am a fan of Ben Kingsley and couldn't possibly see how he would go blindly into such a disappointing set up. You know how the movie is never as good as the book -

this is one time where I was truly wishing would break that mold. But it didn't. Come on, Jennifer Connelly as the alcoholic, down-trodden and desperate protagonist? I was picturing Mary Louis Parker (think *The Client*, 1994).

It left me wanting my time back.

Vonia says

Wow. What a book. I have to admit that this has been on my bookshelves for at least a couple years now. I have taken it down at least a couple times now, each time deterred by the vague premise. Not because it was vague, necessarily, but because what I could glean from it did not appeal to me. Immigrants? Another make it in America story? *The Land of Opportunity*? Very few out of the many books of this type are worth reading. Like books detailing lives during World War II, most notably concentration camps and Nazis. No offense should be taken when I say that these stories tend to be a dime a dozen. The problem is every writer, proficient or not, finds these to be the easiest topics, the emotional scenes, the psychological torment, already built in to the framework, ready to go. Well, that is where they go wrong. Good writing and a good story is not even about that. A good writer needs to make their own connection to their readers.

Anyhow, this time around, I luckily focused more on the party about "a Shakespearean Tragedy". I thought about it. The typical immigrant story. But. Wait! How did I not notice before that it is most certainly not the typical (as far as fiction goes), seeing as it is a tragedy? A Shakespearean one, miserable? And so I began reading again. The first few chapters I had read before. But this time, knowing this was not simply another outline of some Middle Eastern man working physical wage labor in order to "Live the American Dream", but one that might actually end realistically, I read with much more excitement and vigor.

And that thrill kept itself going for most of the book at a steady pace. Until the last fifty to one hundred pages, in which it was heightened three fold. How was this to end? I knew it was a tragedy, but who was going to die? Who was merely to have an unhappy ending? How Shakespearean was it? Completely would of course mean the death of everyone. A loose interpretation would mean at least a few characters. Who would die? Who would live? Who would merely be heartbroken and miserable? More importantly, how? And why would it all have to end this way? Why are the characters not taking other ways out? Why are they forcing circumstances to reach such a tragically inevitable finish?

A conclusion at the end of this book affirming a belief I have long had in regards to films, television shows, and books alike from this nation: more tragic endings, please. It was such a welcome change to read a story with the exact opposite of the typical happy ending. A Shakespearean tragedy, modernized. Unlike other interpretations, there are no other Shakespearean elements aside from this. No retelling of a *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*. So simple, yet so ingenious. One of those things that causes one to ponder why it has not been done before (so well, to my knowledge). Perhaps this level of tragedy is not needed, but other writers seem unable to resist overshadowing any little tragedy so as to finish with an overall happy ending. And guess what? That is not real life. Quite often, terrible things happen. And that's that. Other countries get this. (Some countries even specialize in tragedies. Here's looking at you, Korea.) When are we to get on board?

As I mentioned and I should be obvious, not only are these types of books sorely needed, but they need to be done right. I am not quite sure of the exacts, as far as the multitude of ways I am sure exist to interpret "right", though I do know that Dubus has one version down pat.

*** Spoilers ***

A short summary. Behrani, a respected Colonel in the Iranian Air Force, has immigrated to the States in order to escape a government equivalent to the SWAT Team. His wife, Nadereh (Nadi), daughter Soroya, and son Esmail, have come with him. Nadi was none too happy about it and still had the occasional crying fights with him about it (unfortunately ending in him sleeping and hitting her a few times). Esmail is an ideal son, respectful, obedient, loving, and trusting. Soroya is a newlywed and no longer lives with them. Much to Behrani's disapproval, she is embarrassed and offended by her family's low standing in their new country; she feels the need to make up for this by frequent stories of their former grace and wealth in Iran.

Behrani currently works physical labor. He had switched places of employment several times, but nothing much changes. Embarrassed, he hides these facts from his own family, dressing in a full suit and tie every morning.

He decides to invest everything his family has in real estate. Behind his wife's back, he purchases a nice bungalow in an auction, shocked by his good luck. He won it at one fourth of its market value. The plan is the resell it immediately to get his family in the black and on their way to real success. When her inevitably tells his wife they must move, then move again after he resells the new place, she is furious. Although she ultimately bows her head and followed his wishes, something integral changes in their relationship. It is not long before they all find out (though Behrani tries to hide this from his family) the reason for his supposed luck. Kathy Nicolo, the former owner of the house, was wrongly accused of not paying back taxes and had her home abruptly seized by the county. By the time they realize their mistake, Behrani has already taken full possession.

Like many men, Behrani feels the responsibility of his family lies entirely on his shoulders. His downfall is his pride, his unwillingness to change things that worked in his home country but may not in his new one, and his stubbornness to do whatever it takes to achieve what he deems his family deserves, even in the face of great risk and logic that says otherwise.

Stubbornly, he refuses to give in and sell the house back to the county, even after finding out that Kathy was indeed wrongly accused, her boyfriend Lester, a police officer, comes to threaten him, Kathy herself comes to the house in tears pleading, that this is all she has left (true to a certain extent; she is a recovering drug and alcohol addict and once this fiasco begins, she relapses), the inheritance from her father, Behrani's wife and son even encourage him to return the house to Kathy.

Kathy is devastated to find Behrani making renovations, seeing the inside completely changed when she visits his wife, the family wining and dining wealthy Iranians on the front lawn, and, most of all, when he almost immediately puts it on the market for sale.

One of the times when he returns home to find Kathy talking to his wife, he violently pushed and tackles her, yelling for her to leave his family alone, though Naderah is meanwhile in tears, calling him names and imploring him to stop, to leave her alone. The last time the two of them meet, he finds Kathy sitting in her car on the driveway, gun in hands, ready to commit suicide.

Still, Behrani feels the house is rightfully his. He was fortunate enough to win the house for one fourth its value in the auction and is determined to use the profit to get his family back to a wealthy or at least comfortable place, where he will never again need manual labor. How much is he willing to risk? Kathy has nothing to lose, it seems. But he does. In fact, as it turns out, he has everything to lose.

In the end, Lester holds the three Behrani hostage in their own home, agreeing to let them go only when Behrani signs the house back to Kathy. Obviously, he would be completely naïve to believe this plan would ever work. As soon as Behrani does what he is being demanded to, he can immediately turn around, press charges, and get the house back. Not to mention ruining Kathy and Lester's lives forever. Now that he had nothing to lose, Lester pushes forward. Alas, once he is in the hostage situation, his two choices are to push

forward and hope that Behrani does not press charges, or simply give up.

In the final showdown, Nederah back at the house, he takes Esmail and Colonel Behrani to the courthouse and walks them in. In a moment of distraction, Esmail manages to grab his gun and turn it on him. Nearby screams, police officers in the vicinity turn their guns on him, demanding him to drop his weapon. He looks to his father for guidance, and in a look that he will regret until he dies, he tells his son to not let go of it. Second later, Esmail is shot. Lethally. And the regret "until he dies" becomes a mere few hours. He returns to his house, murders Kathy, suffocates his sleeping wife. Then, donning his Colonel's uniform, turns the gun on himself, laying down next to his wife.

Meanwhile, in his shock and guilt, Lester confesses everything. He is incarcerated along with Kathy.

A refreshing, tragic, most Shakespearean ending, no? Well, I loved it.

Cheryl says

Humid days start off as cool mornings of mist. Depending on the lake's movement, fast or slow, one knows how the day will feel on the skin. And the sky above the ocean always speaks of rain or sun. These are only a few things I like about life on the Coast.

So imagine this *house of sand and fog*, a bungalow with a widow walk that looks out to the ocean; imagine a nice short jog to the beach, mornings and evenings covered in fog that protects and suffocates. Beach life is simple, yet chic. Casual, but not without its touch of elegance.

Yet the lives at this beach house are anything but simple; everything is complicated and tangled. Kathy, a recovering addict and cleaning woman by trade, inherits a bungalow that receives notices about business tax evasion. She never opens the mail, even when the county sends several envelopes announcing an auction sale of her house. The County has the wrong house, but no one knows this. Not even the former political refugee and immigrant, Behrani, a Persian exile who has bought the house for his family. While in America, Behrani, a former wealthy Colonel, works two jobs as a roadside garbage man and at a convenience store and yet he tries to maintain his standard of living so that his daughter marries into privilege. When he sees the house for sale, he buys it, quits his jobs, and tries to settle on a path of real estate development.

I look once more at the woodland, at the fashion in which the sunlight drops through the branches, and I am thinking of our summer home in the mountains near the Caspian Sea, of how the light was the same in those trees along the winding earth road to our bungalow, and for a moment, I feel a sense of *sarnehvesht*, of destiny, and as soon as I do, I stand erect and look back at the property with as cool an eye as I am able, for I do not wish my judgment to be weakened at the point of sale.

If only life was that simple. I'm not sure how Dubus writes another book that surpasses the psychological and physical layers of this one, layers that tugged and pulled at me as I read, layers that no movie can reveal as effortlessly as the book did. Physicality is woven in such style that keeps the reader present, while descriptive wording is pieced into dialogue and paced perfectly. I watched the movie after I read the book and as usual, the movie does the book no justice; in fact, the movie leaves out pertinent information towards the end, while it also seeks to paint a better portrait of Kathy, the former homeowner. However, Dubus does nothing of the sort in the book. His characters are all flawed and deeply disturbed; they all desire more, they

all want to retrieve that which was taken from them and by doing so, they make reckless choices. Alas, greed and desire are competing interests in a story that can only end badly.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

House of Sand and Fog, Andre Dubus III

House of Sand and Fog is a 1999 novel by Andre Dubus III. It was selected for Oprah's Book Club in 2000, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction, and was adapted into the 2003 film, House of Sand and Fog.

The novel begins by introducing Massoud Behrani, a former colonel exiled from Iran after the Iranian Revolution. Because his background is military rather than professional, he has not been able to establish a career in the US and works as a trash collector and convenience store clerk. With savings, he pays the rent on an expensive apartment for his family and for an elegant wedding for his daughter, and his fellow, more successful Iranian exiles do not know that he holds low-skilled jobs. Meanwhile, Kathy Nicolo, a former drug addict who is still recovering from her husband abruptly leaving her, has been evicted from her home, long owned by her family, because of unpaid taxes the county wrongfully claimed she owed. When the house is placed for auction, Behrani seizes the opportunity and purchases it. He bets his son's entire college fund, planning to renovate the house and then resell it for much more than he originally paid as a first step on the way to establishing himself in real-estate investment. He moves his family from their apartment into the house. Meanwhile, when Kathy moves out, she meets Deputy Lester Burdon. They go through the system, hiring a lawyer to fight Kathy's wrongful eviction, but although the County admits the error, Behrani insists that he will not return the house unless he's paid what it's worth, not merely the low sum he paid at auction.

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Jillian says

I read another review on here before I read the book, and the person said that the book was "boring" because this was just two people fighting over a "house."

Actually, it's much more than that, and I thought the house served as a symbol for each person involved. This story gave the reader an inside look into an immigrant family, showing that they are "just like us," fighting for a place in this sometimes disgusting country. The house for Mr. Behrani served as a symbol of "making it" in America. He was working two jobs but lying to his family about the type of work he was doing. He had come from a place where he had been considered a high rank, and I think he felt that he was failing his family and this house was his chance to make things better. For Kathy, I thought the house was the only stable thing in her life - her husband had left her, she fell back into drinking, etc. Although she kept saying it

was her dad's house and he had left it to her and her brother, I think she was more worried about her brother seeing her as the failure he'd always seen her as.

The intensity, passion, and chemistry of Les and Kathy's relationship was there (for me) from the paragraph they met and carried through to the very last page. (I couldn't quite figure out over what time span this book took place but it wasn't a very long period of time. Was it like a week or a little more?)

I had no idea that the book was going to take the turn that it did. At first I was upset about it, but then I realized it was the only way it could end. No one got the house. No one had a happy ending. I was left with a few questions, but they probably couldn't have been answered anyway.
