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# Hausfrau: A Novel

By Jill Alexander Essbaum

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**Hausfrau: A Novel** By Jill Alexander Essbaum

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, THE HUFFINGTON POST, AND SHELF AWARENESS •** “In *Hausfrau*, Anna Karenina goes *Fifty Shades* with a side of *Madame Bovary*.”—*Time*

**“A debut novel about Anna, a bored housewife who, like her Tolstoyan namesake, throws herself into a psychosexual journey of self-discovery and tragedy.”—*O: The Oprah Magazine***

“Sexy and insightful, this gorgeously written novel opens a window into one woman’s desperate soul.”—*People*

**Anna was a good wife, mostly.** For readers of *The Girl on the Train* and *The Woman Upstairs* comes a striking debut novel of marriage, fidelity, sex, and morality, featuring a fascinating heroine who struggles to live a life with meaning.

Anna Benz, an American in her late thirties, lives with her Swiss husband, Bruno—a banker—and their three young children in a postcard-perfect suburb of Zürich. Though she leads a comfortable, well-appointed life, Anna is falling apart inside. Adrift and increasingly unable to connect with the emotionally unavailable Bruno or even with her own thoughts and feelings, Anna tries to rouse herself with new experiences: German language classes, Jungian analysis, and a series of sexual affairs she enters with an ease that surprises even her.

But Anna can’t easily extract herself from these affairs. When she wants to end them, she finds it’s difficult. Tensions escalate, and her lies start to spin out of control. Having crossed a moral threshold, Anna will discover where a woman goes when there is no going back.

Intimate, intense, and written with the precision of a Swiss Army knife, Jill Alexander Essbaum’s debut novel is an unforgettable story of marriage, fidelity, sex, morality, and most especially self. Navigating the lines between lust and love, guilt and shame, excuses and reasons, Anna Benz is an electrifying heroine whose passions and choices readers will debate with recognition and fury. Her story reveals, with honesty and great beauty, how we create ourselves and how we lose ourselves and the sometimes disastrous choices we make to find ourselves.

**Praise for *Hausfrau***

“Elegant . . . There is much to admire in Essbaum’s intricately constructed, meticulously composed novel, including its virtuosic intercutting of past and present.”—*Chicago Tribune*

“For a first novelist, Essbaum is extraordinary because she is a poet. Her language is meticulous and resonant and daring.”—*NPR’s Weekend Edition*

“We’re in literary territory as familiar as Anna’s name, but Essbaum makes it fresh with sharp prose and psychological insight.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“This marvelously quiet book is psychologically complex and deeply intimate. . . . One of the smartest novels in recent memory.”—*The Dallas Morning News*

“Essbaum’s poignant, shocking debut novel rivets.”—*Us Weekly*

“A powerful, lyrical novel . . . *Hausfrau* boasts taut pacing and melodrama, but also a fully realized heroine as love-hateable as Emma Bovary.”—*The Huffington Post*

“Imagine Tom Perrotta’s American nowheresvilles swapped out for a tidy Zürich suburb, sprinkled liberally with sharp riffs on Swiss-German grammar and European hypocrisy.”—*New York*

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### **Hausfrau: A Novel By Jill Alexander Essbaum Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

**An Amazon Best Book of the Month for March 2015:** You are quickly reminded while reading *Hausfrau* that Essbaum is first a poet. Her descriptions—from Anna's mundane trips through the market to her extracurricular erotic trysts—are laced with poetic precision. Anna, an American, has found herself living in her Swiss husband's world of suburban Zurich. We travel with her as she fumbles to live up to all it means to be a good wife, mother, and daughter-in-law while she searches to understand something more and, maybe, somehow, to disrupt the everyday monotony. Flashbacks to the memories Anna allows us, along with poignant glimpses into her regular counseling sessions, are the only clues we are given to try to piece together what is truly going on inside Anna's mind. Where *Hausfrau* really catches you off guard is in the complete journey you find yourself haven taken at the end. I quickly found myself captivated and unable to step away from Anna's every day and as I read the last sentence of the book I was haunted. My thoughts travelled back through the story - the realizations settled in an amazement to all that had happened...and hadn't. Essbaum, in her crafting of *Hausfrau*, executes a story that's telling is just as artful as the story told... a quiet disruption that I still find myself thinking about weeks after reading. – *Penny Mann*

### Review

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“In Jill Alexander Essbaum's promising novel, we meet Anna Benz, an increasingly desperate American housewife and mother of three in her late thirties, positively brimming with ennui. . . . We're in literary territory as familiar as Anna's name, but Essbaum makes it fresh with sharp prose and psychological insight.”—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“This marvelously quiet book is psychologically complex and deeply intimate—as sexy as it is sad. . . . Though Anna, as heroine, has literary precedent, Essbaum has gracefully combined the mundane of the familial, graphic sex scenes, linguistics lessons and precise passages of psychological expertise into something utterly original. Essbaum has written one of the smartest novels in recent memory.”—*The Dallas Morning News*

“Jill Alexander Essbaum's poignant, shocking debut novel rivets.”—*Us Weekly*

“A powerful, lyrical novel . . . *Hausfrau* boasts taut pacing and melodrama, but also a fully realized heroine as love-hateable as Emma Bovary and a poet’s fascination with language. . . . The beauty of *Hausfrau*, however, is the freshness it brings to a trope seemingly beaten into the ground. . . . In Anna, we don’t see a sinfully passionate naïf throwing her life away on a doomed quest for love, à la Bovary or Karenina. Such a parallel hardly seems possible in these liberal modern times when divorce is common and premarital sex expected. But the numbed, uncertain person at the heart of *Hausfrau* is uniquely compelling.”—***The Huffington Post***

“[Essbaum’s] first foray into fiction has already drawn references to *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*. . . . But the self-alienation of the American wife of a Swiss banker, resulting in Jungian analysis and reckless serial adultery, feels more contemporary, subjective, and just plain funny than classical bourgeois ennui. Imagine Tom Perrotta’s American nowheresvilles swapped out for a tidy Zürich suburb, sprinkled liberally with sharp riffs on Swiss-German grammar and European hypocrisy.”—***New York***

“*Hausfrau*, a psychological trip about ‘a good wife, mostly’ who enters into a series of messy affairs and impulsive adventures, is brain-surgically constructed to fascinate you, entertain you, and then make you question what a life lived with meaning looks like—all with a sense of poetic discipline and introspection.”—***Los Angeles Magazine***

“Over a century after the publication of *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*, poet Essbaum proves in her debut novel that there is still plenty of psychic territory to cover in the story of ‘a good wife, mostly.’ . . . The realism of Anna’s dilemmas and the precise construction of the novel are marvels of the form. . . . This novel is masterly as it moves toward its own inescapable ending, and Anna is likely to provoke strong feelings in readers well after the final page.”—***Publishers Weekly* (starred review)**

“[Anna’s] story will fascinate and thrill the most modern readers, even if you don’t agree with her decisions.”—***Bustle***

“*Hausfrau* packs romance, sex, and infidelity into the story about a woman searching for meaning in her life.”—***PopSugar***

“In Anna Benz, Essbaum has created a genuine, complex woman whose journey—no matter how dark it may be—reveals truths as only great literature can. She may have her roots in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina or Flaubert’s Emma Bovary or Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler, but she is a thoroughly modern and distinct character. *Hausfrau* is not just an exceptional *first* novel, it is an extraordinary novel—period.”—***Shelf Awareness***

“[Essbaum’s protagonist] shares more than her name with that classic adulteress, Anna Karenina, but Essbaum has given a deft, modern facelift to the timeless story of a troubled marriage and tragic love in this seductive first novel.”—***Booklist***

“With an elegance, precision, and surehandedness that recalls Marguerite Duras’s *The Lover* and Anita Brookner’s *Hotel du Lac*, Jill Alexander Essbaum gives us this exquisite tale of an expatriate American wife living in Switzerland and her sexual and psychic unraveling. *Hausfrau* stuns with its confidence and severe beauty, its cascading insights into the nature of secrets, the urgency of compulsion and the difficulty of freedom. This is a rare and remarkable debut.”—**Janet Fitch, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *White Oleander***

“I was mesmerized by this book. *Hausfrau* creates a complete, engrossing, and particular world where

nothing is as easy as it should be, according to the hopeful stories we tell ourselves. It's a corrective novel, taking character, destiny, and our choices as seriously as a novelist can."—**Sheila Heti, author of *How Should a Person Be?***

"I loved this brilliant, insightful, and devastating novel about Anna: trains . . . adultery . . . the punctual, rigid Swiss . . . Jungian analysis . . . anhedonia . . . more adultery and more trains . . . and Jill Alexander Essbaum's beautiful sentences strewn with sharp thorns that prick and cut straight into the heart of a woman's unfulfilled life. I wish I had written it."—**Lily Tuck, National Book Award-winning author of *The News from Paraguay***

"A stunningly written, hauntingly paced book. Anna Benz has the weight of a classic heroine—isolated yet crowded—but she is utterly modern in Jill Alexander Essbaum's hands. Reading *Hausfrau* is like staring at a painting that simultaneously seduces and disturbs. Even when you want to turn away, you find your feet are planted to the floor."—**Sloane Crosley, author of *I Was Told There'd Be Cake***

"Hot damn, is *Hausfrau* a beautiful, heart-wrenching novel. It casts a spell that doesn't stop working until that wonderful final line. Jill Alexander Essbaum has a seismic talent, and it shows on every page of her first novel. Just read this bad boy. Like right now."—**Victor LaValle, author of *The Devil in Silver***

"This debut brilliantly chronicles a woman's life falling apart."—***The Times* (U.K.)**

"Uncompromising . . . [a] seductive debut."—***The Guardian* (U.K.)**

"Riveting and shocking."—***Marie Claire* (U.K.)**

"The book that will have everyone talking."—***Cosmopolitan* (U.K.)**

"This slow-burning literary novel of marital disintegration will leave you in bits. It's a bleak, but beautiful read, with echoes of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*."—***Glamour* (U.K.)**

"This book is sheer sex and madness, written in one of the most amazing voices I've ever read."—***Bookriot***

"*Hausfrau* is authentic in its depiction of a strikingly passive woman whose betrayals overwhelm her. There are distinct echoes of *Anna Karenina*. But it is the wordcraft, structure and restrained intimacy of this first novel that make it a standout."—**BBC**

"[An] insightful and shocking portrait of a woman on the edge."—***Woman & Home* (U.K.)**

"With more than a passing resemblance to *Anna Karenina* . . . [*Hausfrau* will] be a book club winner."—***Stylist* (U.K.)**

"The ghost of *Anna Karenina* haunts the poet Jill Alexander Essbaum's debut, *Hausfrau*, about an American in Zürich with the perfect husband, perfect sons and perfect home; but she is far from the perfect wife."—***Harper's Bazaar* (U.K.)**

#### About the Author

**Jill Alexander Essbaum** is the author of several collections of poetry and her work has appeared in *The Best American Poetry*, as well as its sister anthology, *The Best American Erotic Poems, 1800-Present*. She is the winner of the Bakeless Poetry Prize and recipient of two NEA literature fellowships. A member of the core

faculty at the University of California, Riverside's Palm Desert Low-Residency MFA program, she lives and writes in Austin, Texas.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Katherine Sherrer:**

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book called Hausfrau: A Novel? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with their opinion or you have additional opinion?

#### **Elinor Russell:**

Hey guys, do you really wants to finds a new book you just read? May be the book with the title Hausfrau: A Novel suitable to you? The actual book was written by renowned writer in this era. Typically the book untitled Hausfrau: A Novelis the main one of several books which everyone read now. This kind of book was inspired many men and women in the world. When you read this publication you will enter the new dimension that you ever know just before. The author explained their plan in the simple way, thus all of people can easily to be aware of the core of this book. This book will give you a large amount of information about this world now. So you can see the represented of the world on this book.

#### **Edward McClung:**

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book specially book entitled Hausfrau: A Novel the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe unknown for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a book then become one type conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get previous to. The Hausfrau: A Novel giving you a different experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful facts for your better life with this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

#### **William Copeland:**

Are you kind of occupied person, only have 10 or even 15 minute in your day time to upgrading your mind proficiency or thinking skill also analytical thinking? Then you have problem with the book than can satisfy your short period of time to read it because all this time you only find book that need more time to be examine. Hausfrau: A Novel can be your answer mainly because it can be read by you actually who have those short free time problems.



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