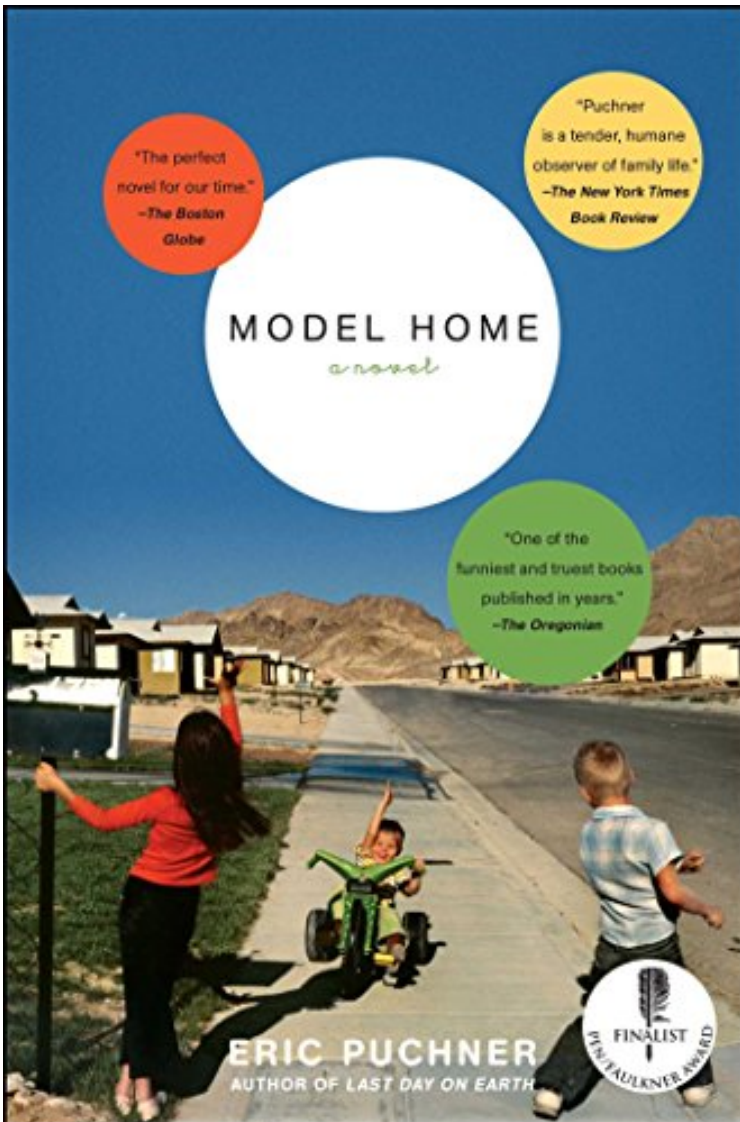


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Model Home: A Novel (English Edition)



Par Eric Puchner

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Warren Ziller moved his family to Southern California in search of a charmed life, and to all appearances, he found it: a gated community not far from the beach, amid the affluent splendor of the 1980s. But the Zillers American dream is about to be rudely interrupted. Warren has squandered their savings on a bad real estate investment, which he conceals from his wife, Camille, who misreads his secrecy as a sign of an affair. Their children, Dustin, Lyle, and Jonas, have grown as distant as satellites, too busy with their own betrayals and rebellions to notice their parents distress. When tragedy strikes, the Zillers are forced to move to Warrens abandoned housing development in the desert. In this comically bleak new home, each must reckon with whats led them there and whos to blameand whether they can summon the forgiveness needed to hold the family together. With penetrating insights into modern life and an uncanny

eye for everyday absurdities, Eric Puchner delivers a wildly funny, heartbreaking, and thoroughly original portrait of an American family. Extrait CHAPTER 1 Two days after his caran 85 Chrysler LeBaron with leather seats and all-power accessories vanished from the driveway, Warren Ziller crept past the expensive homes of his neighbors, trying to match his dogs limp. Buggy Whip Lane was shrouded in a mist that blurred his glasses. It was June, month of foggy mornings; vines of bougainvillea climbed the telephone poles and hung like tinsel from the wires. Warren tugged at Mr. Leonard's leash, trying to keep to the narrow horse trail skirting the road. The wood chips at his feet sent up a pleasing funk of manure. He passed the Hathaways and Wongs and Dunkirks, the Temples and Starchilds, each house white as a tooth, distinguished only by a lone cactus or bronze deer in the yard or surfboard tipped against the wall. There was something very appealing about these surfboards. They looked doomed and precarious but never seemed to fall over. Hed lived here three years and the sight of them still gave him a thrill. When he tried to define California to himself, to reckon the fathomless miles hed traveled from Wisconsin, Warren always thought of these beautiful toys on the verge of collapse. Mr. Leonard stopped along the trail to inspect a rock and began to sing to it. A high, sorrowful croon, as if he might coax the thing into a duet. The mutt was old and arthritic, but it had never occurred to Warren that his mind might deteriorate. As dogs went, hed always been bright and resourceful, sniffing out lost shoes or figuring out how to open doors with his paws. Have you noticed anything funny about Mr. Leonard? Warren asked when he got home. His children were sitting around the kitchen table together, most likely by accident. The house smelled of McDonalds and bare feet. Mr. Leonard limped to his bowl and stared at his meager ration of kibbles. You mean aside from him singing to rocks? Lyle said, clipping her toenails into an empty sneaker on the floor. The sneaker was presumably her own. Youve noticed? Any rock. He cant resist. Maybe someone gave him some LSD, Jonas suggested. I dont think so, Warren said. Has he been jumping out of windows, thinking he can fly? Dustin scoffed. Thats a myth. Dogs cant fly? Lyle said, laying her clippers on the table. Camille, his wife, looked up from the sink. Theres nothing funny about it. I think its inspiring, Dustin said. That he can find love so late in life. In Vietnam, Jonas said, they kill dogs when theyre no longer useful and use them for food. Theres a dish called Dog Seven Ways. Boys! Thats enough, Camille said. Yeah, Lyle said. Mr. Leonard can hear you. The mutt caught his name and came limping over to the kitchen table, tail thumping. How do I love thee, Dustin said, leaning to pet him. Let me count the ways. Camille walked over to Mr. Leonard and bent down to stroke his head, then looked up at them accusingly. I hope you remember this, what a laugh riot youre having, when youre singing to rocks. A guilty hush came over the table. In the silence, Warren had a chance to take in the spectacle of his children: Dustin, his college-bound son, shirtless as usual and eating an Egg McMuffin he must have picked up on the way home from surfing, preparing for another deafening day of band practice in the garage; Lyle, his redheaded, misanthropic daughter, sixteen years old and wearing a T-shirt with DEATH TO SANDWICHES stenciled on the front, her latest protest against corporate advertising; Jonas, eleven and haunted by death . . . what could he say about Jonas? Every morning he poured granola in his bowl and then spent five minutes picking out all the raisins and dates, only to sprinkle them back on top. He liked to know where they were so they wouldnt surprise him. Today he was wearing an orange windbreaker over a matching orange shirt. Warren felt something brush his heart, a draft of despair. He glanced under the table: orange corduroys, and glaring conspicuously above Jonass Top-Siders coral-colored socks. Jonas, youre dressed entirely in orange. Jonas nodded. Hes exercising his individuality, Lyle said. Dustin clapped Jonas on the back. I admire you for making the rest of us seem normal. Warren watched his orange son picking raisins from his cereal. He had enough on his mind already without worrying about the boys mental health. You look like a carrot. Thank you, Jonas said politely. Warren frowned. He picked up the front page of the newspaper and was confronted with Mandy Rogers, the mentally retarded girl whod disappeared from school. It had been two weeks since she went missing. There were signs hanging all over town: the flat, porpoisey face grinning at you from under a cowboy hat. Eerie and inescapable. Warren drove by the Rogerses house, its squadron of news vans, on the way to his office every day. I wish theyd just find that poor girls body, he said. You dont know shes dead, Camille said. I wish you wouldnt go putting ideas in their heads. What do you think? She just wandered off? Yeah, Mom, Lyle said. Shes waiting at the Lost and Found? Maybe its the same guy who stole the Chrysler, Dustin said. I doubt it. Car thieves dont generally abduct people. Warren said this without batting an eye. There were surfboards leaning undisturbed in all their neighbors yards, yet Warrens family had believed him when hed said the Chrysler was stolen. It dismayed him, how easy it had been. A fake call to the police, a trip downtown to file a report. (The truth was hed spent the afternoon at the office.) Hed smoothed any wrinkles of doubt by telling them there were

bands of crooks who specialized in gated communities, knowing that people left their keys in the car. Sitting ducks, hed called the families of Herradura Estates. In truth, Warren had been in denial about the Chrysler.

Hed hoped despite the fact that he hadnt made a payment in six months, had ignored the bill collectors increasingly terse and belligerent notices that the lender might just forget the whole business. Instead the men had come at night, while Warren was asleep. Hed gone out to the driveway with Mr. Leonard and found a dark drool of oil where his car had been. And the stain was only a herald of things to come. There was the furniture, the new Maytag washer, the house itself. Dustin finished his breakfast, licking some grease that had run down his wrist. It was such a boyish gesture, so casually innocent, that the taste of fear eased back down Warrens throat. He would protect this innocence at all costs. If that meant lying to his family until he found a way out of this mess, so be it. How are the Deadbeats? he asked Dustin, whod gotten up to wash his hands in the sink. Warren loved to sit in the garage while they practiced, listening to their brain-throbbing music. Were not called that anymore. Youre not? Its a dumb name, Dustin said. Were trying to think of a better one. He turned his back to Warren, searching for something in the fridge. Warren was very familiar with this back. He had whole conversations with it. It was a strong back, beautiful in its gentle slopes and mesas: hed gotten to know it the way you get to know a favorite view or painting. A back, even a silent one, was better than nothing. Still, there was a certain amount of faith involved: you had to trust it was listening, hunched over a guitar or a surfboard as if you werent even there. His wife had disappeared from the kitchen.

Warren got up from his stool at the counter and went to find her. The hallway, like their room itself, was decorated with shell sculptures and turd-colored macram things and paintings not unlike the splotch of oil staining the driveway. Camille had bought them all at a store called Creativity Unleashed, which sold art by developmentally disabled people. Mandy Rogerss disappearance had inspired her to invest in heroically unattractive art. Shed wanted to hang it all over the house, but the kids had refused to adorn their walls with retard paintings and the bulk had ended up in their bedroom. When Warren objected, wondering if some types of creativity werent better off leashed, Camille had called him hardhearted. He couldnt tell her it was the waste of money that frightened him. Now he found his wife in the bathroom, tugging at her tennis skirt instead of getting dressed for work. He had to remind himself it was Saturday. Camille made educational videos for the public school system, and Warren often felt guilty for not taking it as seriously as she did. It was her goodnessher belief in higher rewards than moneythat hed always been attracted to. Where did Jonas get orange socks? he asked, watching her put on some lipstick. He picked them out at Nordstroms, Camille said. You bought them for him? How was I supposed to know hed dress up like that? Warren sat on the bed to untie his sneakers. Given the choice between a slow kid and a genius who dresses like a carrot, I might have chosen the former. Any word from the police? she asked. What? About the Chrysler! Did they learn anything? Warren shook his head. Probably scattered all over the state by now, he said. Thankfully, Camille didnt seem to question this and began dabbing her lips with a Kleenex. A little pink T, like a cats nose, stained the middle. She was still lovely: blond hair and the sort of wholesome, cheerleadery face, freckled and wide-eyed and slightly bucktoothed, that caused people to smile at her from their cars. She was a Midwesterner in the way Blackbeard was a pirate: iconic to the species. Even when she was angry at Warren she seemed hopelessly preppy, her face a cardigan pink. He wanted to tell her that his project in the desert for which hed sacrificed everything, his familys own future was a disaster. Everything they had was in peril. If she knew, they could face down the debt collectorsthe angry phone calls and investorstogether. It would be like before they were married, when Warren was in law school in Chicago and they were living in a run-down studio in Rogers Park, so poor theyd been forced to eat a moose Camilles brother had shot in Michigan. Theyd survived on ground moose meat all winter, using Hamburger Helper to mask the flavor. Moose Helper, theyd called it, laughing at the TV commercials theyd thought up as a joke. Warren got up from the bed and kissed Camilles neck, holding the faint bulges that had recently formed at her waist. She turned around in surprise. Camille . . . The surprise on her face melted to concern. What is it? Theres something . . . He couldnt meet her eyes. Last week, making love, shed said something to him strange and terrible, a confession of despair. I want to die. Through the bedroom window, he could see Dustin waxing his surfboard in the backyard, kneeling on the lawn while Jonas practiced his fencing moves. The sun had broken through the mist, lighting the persimmon tree near the garden into a blaze of orange fruit. Beneath it, lunging in the sunlight, his fruit-colored son looked weirdly beautiful. Mr. Leonard, Warren said quietly. Maybe its time we had him looked at. 2010 Eric Puchner *Revue de presse* The only conclusion to come to after reading this novel is that Eric Puchner is a massive talent Each character is perfectly drawn and deeply interesting. Go read this book. --McSweeneys Puchners well-constructed tale of a house of pain built on a

foundation of secrets echoes Updike and Easton Ellis. --People magazine, 4 stars Puchner is an extraordinarily talented writer... a master of mood and tone, able to make moments of pure hilarity follow heartbreak with the seamlessness of real life. --Boston Globe