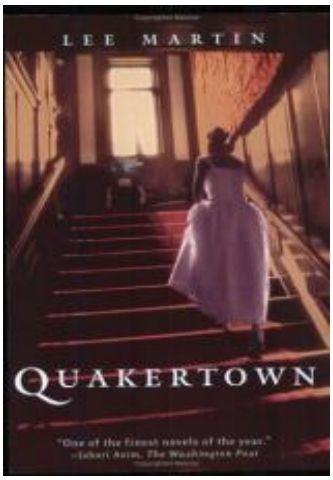
Quakertown: A Novel

by Lee Martin



About the Book

Lorrie Moore called **The Least You Need to Know**, Lee Martin's debut collection, "beautifully written stories of fathers and sons, and the large and small improvisations that make up American life." USA Today hailed his memoir From Our House for its "moving" portrayal of "the complexities that exist in many American families-equal parts frustration, anger, yearning, and tenacious love." **Quakertown** brings the prodigious literary gifts of this award-winning author to life in a beautifully written, deeply affecting story of hope, love, loss, forgiveness, and grace.

Based on a real-life episode in our nation's history, Martin's eagerly-anticipated first novel transports us back to North Texas in the 1920s-and into the lives of a segregated black community and their wealthy white brethren. Although separated by only a few miles, they live in two very different worlds marked by rigidly enforced class boundaries and the smoldering racial tensions of the deep South during the Jazz Age.

For the inhabitants of the flourishing black community of Quakertown, life can be sweet. On a warm night in May, when the magnolias are in bloom and rare white lilacs can be found growing wild along the Pecan Creek that runs along the edges of this fine Denton neighborhood, Little Washington Jones imagines there is no lovelier place in all of Texas. A yardman for the white families who live in the grand houses along Oak Street, Little is known for his miraculous way with a flower or a tree or a shrub. His half-white wife, Eugie, works as a seamstress at Neiman's department store. Their daughter, Camellia, named for one of the most beautiful flowers, is a schoolteacher whose conflicted love for two men-one white, one black-becomes the catalyst for the story's dramatic action.

As a child, Camellia met Kizer Bell when Little brought her along with him on his gardening rounds. Kizer, born lame to a powerful banker and a depressed, alcoholic mother, is secretly shamed by his deformity and knows he can never lead a completely whole life. The young Camellia is the only person who has ever treated him with real tenderness, and he treasures their precious time together. When they meet as adults, they renew their bond, and a youthful friendship blossoms into a deep and abiding love. Although Kizer's father, Andrew, is a fair and kind-hearted man who likes and

respects Little and his family, the lovers know there is no future for them. Instead, a pregnant Camellia makes plans to marry Ike Mattoon, the volatile, hell-raising son of a Baptist minister. Their story is played out against the backdrop of a town in turmoil, when Little Washington Jones is asked to do something completely unimaginable.

Imbued with Martin's deep compassion, abiding wisdom, and profound humanity, **Quakertown** is an unforgettable story of two families, and of the redemption we seek but may not so easily find.

Discussion Guide

1. Little Washington Jones is the first character we meet in the book. How do these first few pages, which give us a strong sense of his world view and of Quakertown, set up our expectations for the rest of the story?

2. Little's father once told him that a black man with a talent could always make white folks take notice. How does Little's gift for gardening affect his own life? The lives of others? What kind of husband and father is he?

3. In the Prologue, Eugie tells Little that he's "as proud as Lucifer." What does she mean by this? She calls him a yardman who "carries white folks' dirt home under his fingernails" but that nothing is ever going to make him white. Do you think Little wishes he were white? Does he resent his blackness? Or is it Eugie who is ashamed of the part of her mixed heritage?

4. Is Tibby Bell secretly ashamed that her son is crippled? Do she and Andrew blame themselves for his deformity? Does Kizer blame them? How does this influence his love for Camellia?

5. Which character influences Camellia the most? What is the relationship between Camellia and Eugie? How does her mother play a significant role in Camellia's decision about her unborn child? Describe.

6. How would you describe the relationship between Little and his employer, Andrew? In what ways does it exemplify relations between whites and blacks of that particular time and place in America? In what ways is it unique? What is Little's initial reaction when Andrew requests his help in moving Quakertown to another location?

7. What does Ike Mattoon represent in the story? Does he seem to truly love Camellia? What role does he play in the novel's later tragedy?

8. How do Camellia's actions throughout the course of the book affect the lives of others? How does her decision to marry Ike in spite of the fact that she may be carrying Kizer's child affect her? How does it affect Ike? Kizer?

9. What does the unborn baby come to symbolize in the story?

10. Shame is a recurring theme in the book and reverberates in the lives of most of the characters: Little, Kizer, Camellia, Ike, Bert Gleason. Discuss the source of this powerful emotion in each of the character's lives and how it affects their actions.

11. How do themes of pride and redemption play out in the book, especially after Andrew accidentally kills Eugie? How does the tragedy impact on the other characters, Tibby in particular?

12. How does knowing the history of the characters help you to understand their present motives and behavior? For example, the suicide of Tibby's mother?

Author Bio

Lee Martin is the author of such novels as THE BRIGHT FOREVER, a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. His writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Harper?s*, *Ms Magazine*, *The Georgia Review* and *The Kenyon Review*, and his work has been anthologized in *The Best American Essays* and *The Best American Mystery Stories*. His books have been widely translated and won many awards, including a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers award. He teaches in the MFA Program at The Ohio State University.

Critical Praise

"Lee Martin's brilliant first novel?**Quakertown** deserves a wide audience."

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