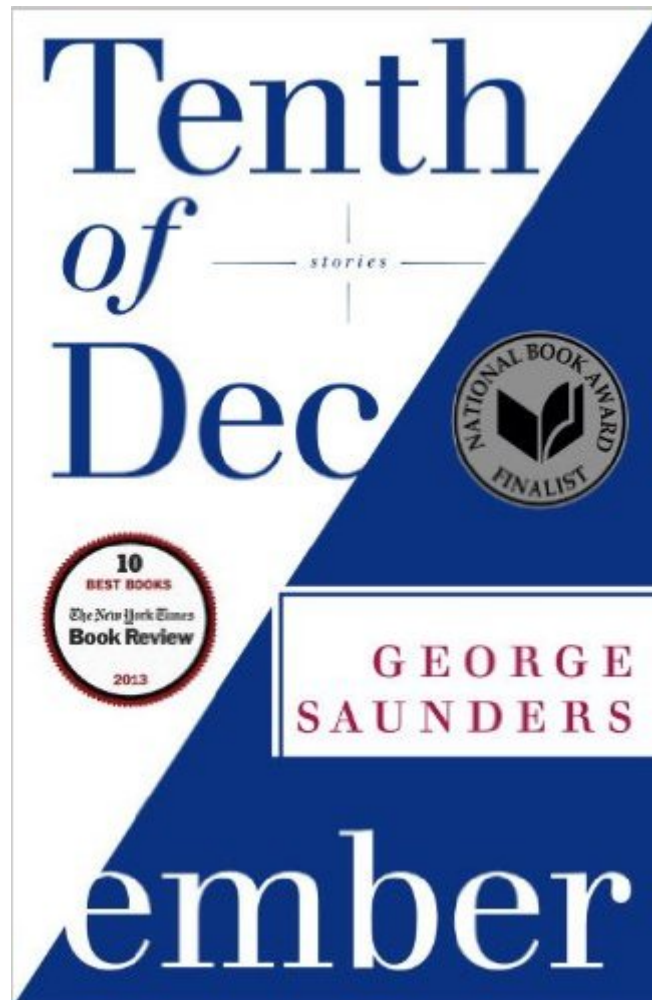


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Tenth Of December: Stories



Synopsis

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST • NAMED ONE OF THE TEN BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY People • The New York Times Magazine • NPR • Entertainment Weekly • New York • The Telegraph • BuzzFeed • Kirkus Reviews • BookPage • Shelf

Awareness! Includes an extended conversation with David Sedaris One of the most important and blazingly original writers of his generation, George Saunders is an undisputed master of the short story, and *Tenth of December* is his most honest, accessible, and moving collection yet. In the taut opener, "Victory Lap," a boy witnesses the attempted abduction of the girl next door and is faced with a harrowing choice: Does he ignore what he sees, or override years of smothering advice from his parents and act? In "Home," a combat-damaged soldier moves back in with his mother and struggles to reconcile the world he left with the one to which he has returned. And in the title story, a stunning meditation on imagination, memory, and loss, a middle-aged cancer patient walks into the woods to commit suicide, only to encounter a troubled young boy who, over the course of a fateful morning, gives the dying man a final chance to recall who he really is. A hapless, deluded owner of an antiques store; two mothers struggling to do the right thing; a teenage girl whose idealism is challenged by a brutal brush with reality; a man tormented by a series of pharmaceutical experiments that force him to lust, to love, to kill—the unforgettable characters that populate the pages of *Tenth of December* are vividly and lovingly infused with Saunders's signature blend of exuberant prose, deep humanity, and stylistic innovation. Writing brilliantly and profoundly about class, sex, love, loss, work, despair, and war, Saunders cuts to the core of the contemporary experience. These stories take on the big questions and explore the fault lines of our own morality, delving into the questions of what makes us good and what makes us human. Unsettling, insightful, and hilarious, the stories in *Tenth of December*—through their manic energy, their focus on what is redeemable in human beings, and their generosity of spirit—not only entertain and delight; they fulfill Chekhov's dictum that art should "prepare us for tenderness." NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER "The best book you'll read this year." "The New York Times Magazine" "A feat of inventiveness . . . This eclectic collection never ceases to delight with its at times absurd, surreal, and darkly humorous look at very serious subjects. . . . George Saunders makes you feel as though you are reading fiction for the first time." "Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*" "The best short-story writer in English" not "one of," not "arguably," but the Best. "Mary Karr, *Time*" "A visceral and moving act of storytelling . . . No one writes more powerfully than George Saunders about the lost, the unlucky, the

disenfranchised.â •â "Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times Â â œSaundersâ™s startling, dreamlike stories leave you feeling newly awakened to the world.â •â "People Â GEORGE SAUNDERS WAS NAMED ONE OF THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD BY TIME MAGAZINE

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Customer Reviews

Sometimes morbid, sometimes zany, often touching, and always original, the stories collected in Tenth of December are written in a light, conversational style -- typically the kind of conversation you'd have with someone who is a little dim -- that conceals their deeper meaning. Many of the characters are like the parents or children you're glad you never had. My favorite story, "Victory Lap," begins in the mind of Alison, a fifteen-year-old girl whose internal commentary on Eleanor Roosevelt, her ethics teacher's husband's affair, her own ignorance, and the dorkiness of Kyle Boot is, to use Alison's favorite word, awesome. The story then shifts to the scattered mind of Kyle Boot (favorite word: "gar"), whose chance of pleasing his anal-retentive father is nil and whose thoughts are filled with imaginative curses that he would never dare say out loud. When Kyle sees a man trying to kidnap Alison, he must choose between intervening and finishing his chores. The story develops a new layer of oddness when we enter the mind of the kidnapper. The ending is surprisingly sweet as humor and horror give way to karma. The title story is another standout. Robin is a pale, blubberish boy who invents his own martial arts system (Deadly Forearms) to fight the Nethers. Eber, old and rail-thin, no longer seems real to himself. Both Robin and Eber constantly engage in imagined conversations. When Robin spots Eber (thinking he may be a Nether) walking

around a frozen pond, Robin makes it his heroic mission to deliver Eber's coat to him without realizing why Eber left the coat behind. The story is a bittersweet combination of humor and sorrow and inspiration.

I found it interesting that this book places the only two somewhat upbeat stories in the collection at the beginning and the end, as if the editor thought that doing this might help to disguise the unremitting darkness of the stories that make up most of the book. I'm afraid the effect is more along the lines of a gloom sandwich, in which the relatively upbeat slices of bread do little to mask the depressive filling. Of course, my reaction is largely a matter of personal taste. I think George Saunders is a remarkable writer and a true artist, but for me, there's just too much darkness and ugliness in this collection to stomach. Some notes on selected stories: "Victory Lap" is the opening story, and therefore one of the two fairly upbeat pieces I mentioned. It indulges in an engaging playfulness with language (as do most of the stories in this collection, to some extent), but apart from that I found it a story with unrealistic characters in an unrealistic situation that comes to an unrealistic conclusion. "Puppies" extends that playfulness with language into the realm of just-plain-hard-to-read. I was reminded of a recent quote from Booker Prize judge Peter Strothard, stating that literary works of art "have to offer a degree of resistance." This story offers resistance in spades, and in return for chewing through that resistance you get one of the most gruelingly dark stories I've ever read. In this story and a few others, it feels to me that Saunders is approaching outright sadism toward his characters. "Escape from Spiderhead" is another example of this.

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