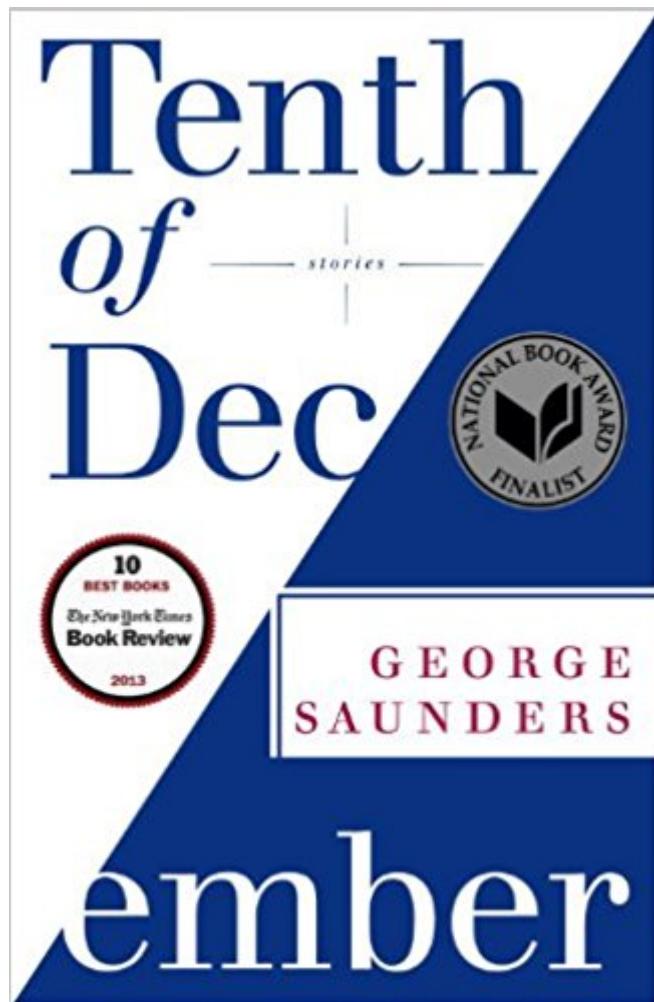


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# Tenth Of December: Stories



## Synopsis

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FINALIST *George Saunders* has been *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' 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 *George Saunders*.

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

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (January 7, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812984250

ISBN-13: 978-0812984255

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars (1,062 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #9,917 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Satire #90 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Satire #125 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories

## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, January 2013: George Saunders' first short-story collection in six years, *Tenth of December* is as profound and moving as it is entertaining. Saunders' wonderful ability to portray a character's inner monologue--the secret voices, the little fantasies, the inside jokes, the spots of sadness--might be his greatest talent as a writer. But he is also expert at parcelling out details to hook the reader and nudge the story in whatever direction he wants it to go. While these stories are generally more straightforward than we're used to seeing from this author, the turns they take are constantly surprising. Saunders is an American original, a writer gifted at expressing the irony and absurdity all around us and inside us, but his ultimate goal is to show us something deeper: Our lives are composed of genuine experiences that deserve to be taken seriously. --Chris Schluep --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** Saunders, a self-identified disciple of Twain and Vonnegut, is hailed for the topsy-turvy, gouging satire in his three previous, keenly inventive short story collections. In the

fourth, he dials the bizarreness down a notch to tune into the fantasies of his beleaguered characters, ambushing readers with waves of intense, unforeseen emotion. Saunders drills down to secret aquifers of anger beneath ordinary family life as he portrays parents anxious to defang their children but also to be better, more loving parents than their own. The title story is an absolute heart-wringer, as a pudgy, misfit boy on an imaginary mission meets up with a dying man on a frozen pond. In "Victory Lap," a young-teen ballerina is princess-happy until calamity strikes, an emergency that liberates her tyrannized neighbor, Kyle, "the palest kid in all the land." In "Home," family friction and financial crises combine with the trauma of a court-martialed Iraq War veteran, to whom foe and ally alike murmur inanely, "Thank you for your service." Saunders doesn't neglect his gift for surreal situations. There are the inmates subjected to sadistic neurological drug experiments in "Escape from Spiderhead" and the living lawn ornaments in "The Semplica Girl Diaries." These are unpredictable, stealthily funny, and complexly affecting stories of ludicrousness, fear, and rescue. --Donna Seaman --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

George Saunders' "Tenth of December" is one of the New York Times best books of the year. This book is powerful, dark and disturbing. If you are looking for a "fun read," this is not it. At times, I felt distaste for the author's mind. Initially, I thought what he filled his head with was cold, boring and uninteresting. As I read more, I realized how well written these stories are. The ten stories here reach into the very core of human existence. They are an eye-opener to the problems we face in our relationships to each other and ourselves. Jealousy, self-justification, loneliness, lack of empathy, hate, meanness, violence and brutality are all here. I have heard that the author has called his book a "lab experiment." "Escape From Spiderhead," story number 4, is certainly a good example. Free will is derailed in this story: Jeff had a criminal past; in a moment of fury, he killed Mike in a fight and was arrested. His mother pleaded that he be spared prison, so instead of a life behind bars, Jeff became a guinea pig in a laboratory. The head of the spider is the control room. Its legs are the workrooms for the experiments. Mobi packs are surgically attached to each of the subjects, so that they can be given different drugs. ED289/290 can make a person fall in love and have certain thoughts that the subjects think are their own. Jeff is incredibly attracted to Rachel, falls in love with her and has an intense sexual encounter. Given another drug, he falls out of love and cannot see what he had found was so attractive about Rachel before. He then has the same experience with Heather. He is

surprised to find that both these women have had the same sort of relationships with another man, Rogan. Then the Confirmation Committee wants the experimenters to give Heather Darkfloxx and record Jeff's reaction to her suffering. Life is not worth living with this drug. Heather dies horribly. Jeff is now told to Darkfloxx Rachel, but he won't say he acknowledge, despite the fact that he now knows all the subjects have had violent criminal pasts. Jeff's bosses, Verlaine and Abnesti, try to override him using Docilryde, which will allow his bosses to make Jeff push the lethal button. Docilryde is in Jeff's mobipak, but Jeff has to give them permission to use it. When Verlaine and Abnesti leave to get an override, Jeff gives himself Darkfloxx and dies. When he dies, his spirit flies above the building with the birds. Jeff is free at last. He is relieved that he won't have to kill anyone ever again. Jeff thinks about various murderers and wonders if their crimes were their fault. It is really a matter of predestination, he thinks. God charged them with growing up as mess-ups. These stories can have different interpretations. For example, a couple of members in my book club thought that the fifth story, "Exhortation," was a light one. When I explained my interpretation, they changed their minds. In

Exhortation, the director's letter instructs the employees to have a good attitude towards their work. Doesn't this sound like your job boss in a motivation meeting? Employees are told to get the job done quickly, instead of taking extra time thinking negatively about doing it. The bosses in headquarters are watching your numbers. They say the work is hard but important. Everyone has assignments to do. Room 6 has especially hard tasks. Moping will take up precious time. If your numbers go down, someone else will take your place. You will be put on a shelf to be cleaned. Do not worry about whether what we are doing is right or wrong, good or bad. Isn't it fun when you don't hold back, but just pound down and down, letting gravity help you? We then learn that Andy had a record-breaking October. Everyone is praising him. However, his numbers are slacking off now. He has been crying and regretting what he has done. It did not take me long to realize that the employees were killing people in Room 6. To be put on the

ÃfÃ¢Ã ª ¬Ã Å“shelfÃfÃ¢Ã ª ¬Ã Â• to be ÃfÃ¢Ã ª ¬Ã Å“cleanedÃfÃ¢Ã ª ¬Ã Â• meant to be killed. Some of the stories have some ambiguity. I did not see anything

ÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  Ã“positiveÃƒÂ¢Ã  ¬Ã  Ã• in any of them, but some people do. I think some people miss the point. However, there are many levels to these stories, and I may not have understood everything, as well. The stories are hardly superficial. They are worth another read.

George Saunders' *Tenth of December* has received luminous reviews, and I bought it on the basis of both personal recommendations and critics' applause. I like the title story best of the bunch, but have a hard time ascribing to it or the others -- some very short -- the extremely high praise it has received. The prose is lively, the characters well-shaped though to my reading mostly sketched, and the situations in the longer stories are compelling. Whose short stories do you like -- Raymond Carver's? Hemingway's? Isak Dinesen's? de Maupassant's? Those are some of my favorites. I'm not yet feeling like Saunders' stories join that level of literature. Maybe they will stick with me and unfold their pleasures/insights gradually, or maybe I need to read another of Saunders' collections (which I'm likely to do). But for now, I can just say 'yeah, he's good.' I allow it may be my own blind spot that keeps me from being truly wowed.

There must be 200+ eloquent, articulate, thorough, Iowa-style reviews of this fabulous book...allow me to simply say, I loved every page of this book! Saunders is one of my very favorite writers...Really, who can write a riveting short story on one page?

I facilitate a book club of approximately 20 people. We had book club in June after reading *Tenth of December*. We would give it a 1 Star Rating. It was the most unpopular book we read during the Sept-June Season. The feedback was terrible, no connection with the writing at all. I would say this was very unusual for our club, usually someone is in favor of the book. No one enjoyed the read. Most said after story 2 or 3 they gave up and didn't complete the book. I completed the book and it did not get better, very disappointed with this book. I would not recommend this book. Bad choice for our well loved book club.

A lot of people are saying things like they just didn't get this book or found it hard to follow. Here's a tip turn off Rachel Ray or The Chew or whatever shit show you have playing in the background and FOCUS. Yes his writing style demands your full attention and if you give it, you are rewarded. The first and the last stories are my favorites, if they didn't touch you in any way you are either dumb or dead inside. P.S writing a review and giving something one star because "You didn't get it." Only makes you look stupid, why waste your gime?

Overall this collection is disappointing. The final story is the strongest with Saunders at his best ~ funny and poignant and wonderfully human. Others in the collection suffer from overly clever

pseudo white trash characters and uninteresting plot devices.

George Saunders has a unique voice, ever-changing, and yet, so George Saunders. TENTH of DECEMBER is his strongest collection of characters and narrative yet.

Just got done reading this book through for the second time. Every story is amazing. Upper level short story writing. Probably the best living short story writer we have today. Highly recommended. I cried in 75% of stories, I'd estimate.

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