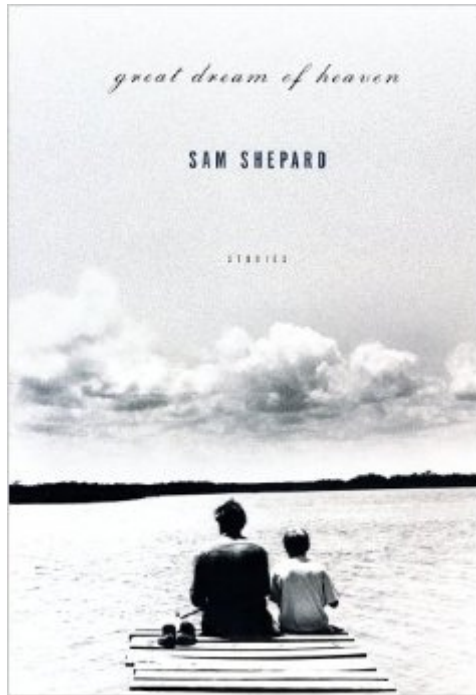


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Great Dream Of Heaven: Stories



Synopsis

In these eighteen elegantly terse stories, Sam Shepard taps the same wellsprings that have made him one of our most acclaimed—and distinctly American—playwrights: sex and regret, the yearning for a frontier that has been subdivided out of existence, the comic gulf of misapprehension between men and women, and the even deeper gulf that separates men from their true selves. A fascinated boy watches the grim contest between a "remedy man"—a fixer of bad horses—and a spectacularly bad-tempered stallion, a contest that mirrors the boy's own struggle with his father. A suburban husband starts his afternoon shopping for basil for a party and ends it holding one of the guests at gunpoint in the basement. Two old men, who have lived together companionably since their wives died or left them and their children scattered to a silicon computer hell, are brought to grief by a waitress at the local Denny's. Filled with absurdity, sorrow, and flinty humor, *Great Dream of Heaven* is Shepard at his best, exercising his gifts for diamond-sharp physical description and effortless dialogue in stories that recall the themes he has explored with such singular intensity in his work for the theater.

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Customer Reviews

Shepard, the well-known playwright and actor, has written eighteen brief stories that are filled with unforgettable images. They deal with the unexpected reactions of human nature, especially sex and the yearnings for things that no longer exist. Shepard is at his best with these stories as he clearly and effortlessly describes the sorrows, joys, and fallibility of everyday life. I enjoyed all of

Shepard's stories in his second collection of fiction. It would be hard to choose any one favorite, but "Blinking Eye" is one I will never forget. It will leave an unforgettable image on your mind. It is about a young girl driving cross-country bearing an urn containing her mother's ashes when she encounters an injured hawk on the side of the road. She decides to take the injured hawk to a veterinarian for help. What happens after she places the hawk in her car will definitely leave a vivid image in your mind forever. Shepard's gift of writing is effortless to read for he brings all of his stories to life in a clear, concise, and beautifully detailed matter. This is a book not to be missed!! Joe Hanssen

Fans of playwright Sam Shepard will enjoy this collection of short pieces, many of them not more than monologues or brief sketches of dialogue. Sometimes the blanks are filled in and we get an actual short story, as in the title story, about two elderly men who compete for the attention of a waitress at Denny's. Also, "An Unfair Question," in which an over-inquisitive party guest interested in guns is taken to the basement by her host, who becomes dangerously impatient with her. Others tend toward a Mamet-like fascination with the way people talk who have little to say and don't listen to each other. In "Living the Sign," a fast-food customer tries unsuccessfully to strike up a conversation with the young employees about a thoughtful message hung over the chicken wings. A father and his two school-age children, in "Berlin Wall Piece," struggles without much success - or gratitude - to help his son with a homework assignment. Two telephone conversations comprise the extent of "Coalinga 1/2 Way," in which one person attempts vainly to keep the other person from walking out of a relationship. Four voice mail messages comprise another, as a shady character reports to a client on the fate of an injured race horse in "Tinnitus." Two personal favorites are "The Remedy Man," about a man who breaks a willful horse, as well as the tyrannical hold of a father over his son, and the monologue "The Company's Interest," in which a lone night-shift filling station attendant is confronted by two long haired, tattooed and much overweight customers. Mostly set in the West, many in California, this collection of stories shows flashes of mercurial creative intelligence sending off sparks of story fragments - characters, situations, dialogue, each elusive and elliptical, verbal fireworks against a night sky, your imagination filled with evocative afterimages. BTW, the cover photo is by Jessica Lange.

"Life is what's happening to you while you're making plans for something else." That one sentence from "Living the Sign", sums up this entire collection of simple stories that really hit the nail on the head. The story itself is a metaphor for the collection: The sentence is posted on a sign in a fast

food joint by one of its employees, and the sign prompts one customer to begin a mini journey of discovery to find the one prescient individual among the glassy-eyed help behind the counter. In "The Remedy Man" we get a simple take on the proverbial Horse Whisperer (though E.V., the title character wouldn't classify himself as such - hence the title - he fixes things). But, is this the story of E.V. fixing a horse, or that of him helping a young boy find his own strength and way under the thumb of his controlling father? The characters in these stories, whether a man unable to grasp his role as father and husband who takes another partygoer hostage at gun point or so obsessed with horse breeding that he locks himself away from his family annually to study catalogs, are either at moments of absolute clarity or complete detachment from life. And, Shepard's sharp, concise dialog and writing snaps right to the point every time.>>>>>>

Sam Shepard, a world-renowned playwright, is also an excellent short story author. His collection, *Great Dream of Heaven*, is innovative, refreshing, fast moving, and brilliant. I found myself reading some of the stories out loud to my friends and family. *Great Dream of Heaven* is a must read.

There's not quite enough humour in these plays-in-embryo for my liking. Only the two actual dialogues (one with extensive Shaw-style stage notes) and the splendid *An Unfair Question* have the authentic Shepardian frisson

Shepard has thrown away everything not absolutely necessary to get at the core of what matters. Each story in this slim volume gets to the center of a facet of life and illuminates it. Though every tale is stripped to essentials each is true to life. Perfect reading for a Sunday afternoon. Highly recommended.

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