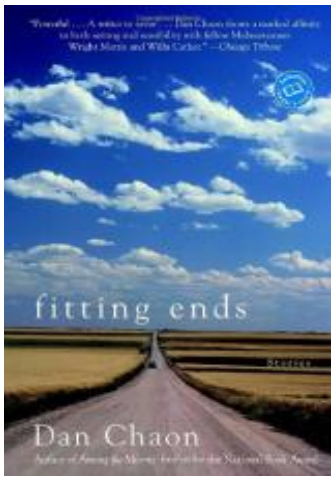
Fitting Ends

by Dan Chaon



About the Book

FITTING ENDS is the first collection of fiction by the acclaimed author of the National Book Award finalist AMONG THE MISSING and now appears in this newly revised edition with two never before collected stories.

Written before AMONG THE MISSING and originally published by Northwestern University Press, FITTING ENDS features 13 stories detailing the almost panicked angst of the American generation now approaching 30. Struggling with gaps between youthful expectations and adult experiences, these characters long for understanding and acceptance --- but are thwarted by failed love, family disruptions, numbing work, and sexual confusion.

Chaon is one of the most promising new voices in fiction, and this re-issued collection offers further evidence of his unique talent.

Discussion Guide

1. Chaon has professed to being influenced by the well-known old story, "The Lady or the Tiger?" Like that story, many of the stories in **Fitting Ends** deliberately end on the edge of a moment, leaving the reader to decide what the future holds in store for a character. Do the stories point the reader toward a particular conclusion, or do they leave the unanswered questions entirely to the reader's own view of human nature?

2. In "Presentiment," Rich thinks: "Love didn't have anything to do with the outside world: It just happened. Some mysterious brain chemistry set in, and you couldn't avoid it." Is his love for his autistic son really so mysterious? How does this example of love compare with others in the book? Are some types of love more positive than others?

3. Many of the young characters in **Fitting Ends** exhibit a great dread of the future. What does their pessimism stem from? Is it a function of psychology? Family and social circumstances? The larger culture? Do you think these young

adults will continue to face the world with such trepidation as they get older, or is there hope that they will grow out of it?

4. A review of **Fitting Ends** in the *Chicago Tribune* said, "Dan Chaon shows a marked affinity in both setting and sensibility with fellow Midwesterners Wright Morris and Willa Cather." What is a "Midwestern sensibility"? Are there places in these stories that seem to particularly represent such a sensibility? Which aspects of Midwestern life does Chaon seem critical of, and which does he appear to view with affection?

5. In "Thirteen Windows," the narrator admits that sometimes he sees things that aren't there, and many of the other characters in the book struggle with skewed perceptions of the world around them. To what extent are the various characters' problems a result of misinterpretations of reality? To what extent are the characters lying to themselves? Do you see some of the narrators as more clear-sighted and honest than others? Which ones seem most trustworthy?

6. "Chinchilla," "Accidents," and "Going Out" all present children who must cope with a parent's alcoholism or mental illness, but every child responds to his or her situation in a different way. Why? What are the factors that seem to influence each of these children the most?

7. Ghosts and ghostly visions figure prominently in several of the stories. In other stories a memory of a person's past self haunts the present. What do ghosts represent in the world of these stories? What would it take to dispel these ghosts?

8. Several of the characters in the book have made an effort to break loose from their small-town roots, and they are often in conflict with those they have left behind. What are the advantages and disadvantages of setting off on one's own, versus the decision to stay put and remain close to one's origins?

9. In his interview, Chaon talks of being concerned about the order in which the stories appear in **Fitting Ends**. How did you approach reading the stories in this book? Did you start with the first story and read straight through until the end, or did you skip around here and there? Would the order in which you read the stories change the effect of the book as a whole? Why do you think Chaon chose to place the stories in this particular order?

10. The epigraph of the book evokes Charles Dickens's **A Christmas Carol**, and Scrooge's desperate question to the Ghost of Christmas Future: "Are these the shadows of things that Will be, or are they the shadows of things that May be, only?" In what ways are these stories about fate, about the "shadows of things that Will be"? Are the characters' futures sealed, or is there hope for them to change? Are their ends really "fitting," or should we to take the title of the collection ironically?

Author Bio

Dan Chaon is the author of several books, including ILL WILL, a national bestseller that was named one of the 10 best books of the year by *Publishers Weekly*. Other works include the short story collection STAY AWAKE, a finalist for the Story Prize; the national bestseller AWAIT YOUR REPLY; and AMONG THE MISSING, a finalist for the National Book Award. Chaon?s fiction has appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, the Pushcart Prize Anthologies, and the O. Henry Collection. He has been a finalist for the National Magazine Award in Fiction and the Shirley Jackson Award, and he was the recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature. Chaon lives in Cleveland.

Critical Praise

"The best of these stories . . . possess a rare, disorienting force. When you look up from them, the quality of light seems a little different. It?s a reminder to those of us who have almost forgotten what literature can sometimes do."

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