

## Memory Plays

**Stephen Evans**

Time Being Media

(340pp)

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*The stories within Memory Plays are about how people reconcile truth and memory through romances, grief, the creative process, and even miracles.*

In Stephen Evans's distinctive short story collection *Memory Plays*, four sets of principal characters at various crossroads cope with life-altering moments based on their past experiences.

In the opening story, a witty, self-described Grace Kelly lookalike is forced to confront the circumstances that tore her and her college lover apart. In another tale, a business owner navigates the height of the holiday season and recollections of a lost friend in an attempt to be of service to them. Elsewhere, truth and fiction collide as a writer's perception of high school and the girl he adored make their way into a rough draft. And in the final story, a physician revisits a Massachusetts town where he witnesses and is changed by what could be either his grandfather's mental health crisis or a different sort of heartbreak altogether.

Despite their different backgrounds, the characters are connected by deep pain as well as joy. Their narrative voices are distinct, though, enabling smooth transitions between tales. Understated elegance reigns throughout the book, whose prose is poetic on the whole. Quips between two exes with more than a few years and misunderstandings between them fade into the precise, somewhat finicky nature of an antiques expert trying to do right by someone who is long gone; the romantic notions of a teenage relationship that may or may not have been doomed from the start are embellished with flair. The doctor's point of view is straightforward, yet somehow not so rigid as to ignore the feelings he associates with family and a place he once left behind.

Throughout each plotline, rich sensory details—as of a broken clock at a train station, and with references to the standard machinery found in an emergency room—paint thorough pictures of situations while also creating a stark contrast between the settings and the dialogue, which is variously playful, flirtatious, and strained. In a difficult conversation, a character must come to terms with how their own tangled memories have affected their perception of reality, perhaps even of someone else's side of a given story. And while each tale at least hints at some kind of resolution, room is left for speculation.

*Memory Plays* is an introspective short story collection about the complexities of understanding the combined power of the past, the present, and the future.

KATELYNN WATKINS (February 25, 2025)

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