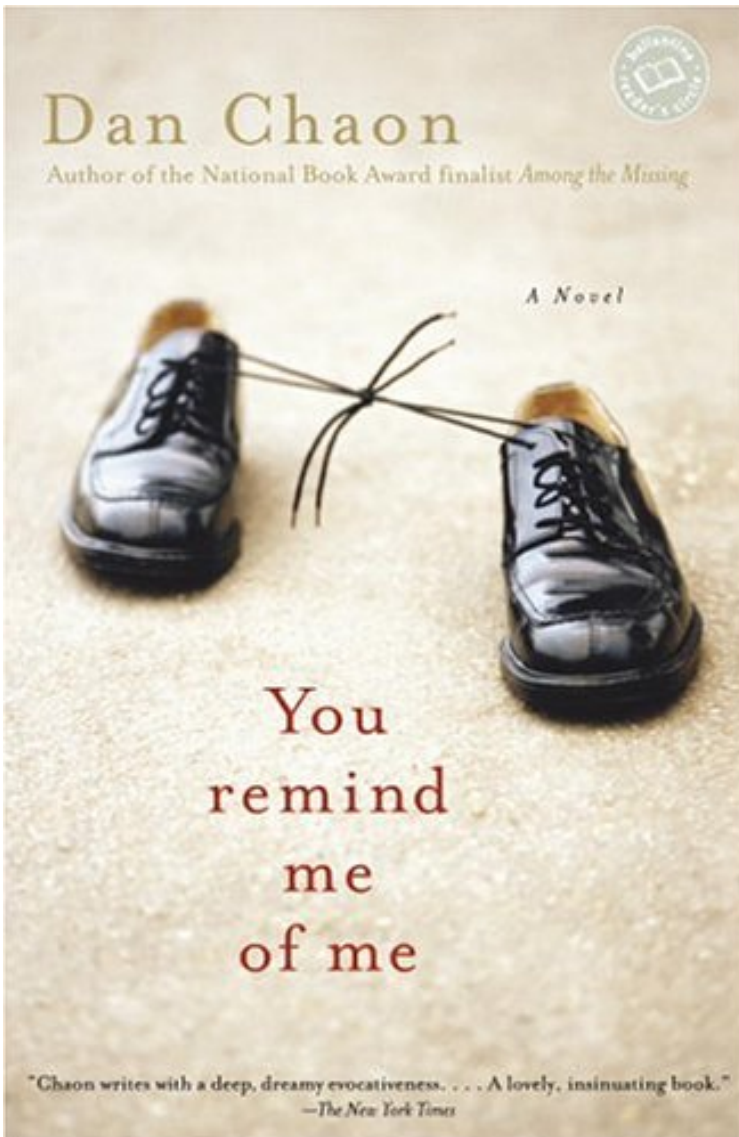


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You Remind Me of Me



Par Dan Chaon
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ventes : #970317 dans eBooksPubli le:
2004-05-25Sorti le: 2004-05-
25Format: Ebook Kindle

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWith his critically acclaimed Among the Missing and Fitting Ends, award-winning author Dan Chaon proved himself a master of the short story form. He is a writer, observes the Chicago Tribune, who can convincingly squeeze whole lives into a mere twenty pages or so. Now Chaon marshals his notable talents in his much-anticipated debut novel. You Remind Me of Me begins with a series of separate incidents: In 1977, a little boy is savagely attacked by his mothers pet Doberman; in 1997 another little boy disappears from his grandmothers backyard on a sunny summer morning; in 1966, a pregnant teenager admits herself to a maternity home, with the intention of giving her child up for adoption; in 1991, a young man drifts toward a career as a drug dealer, even as he hopes for something better. With penetrating insight and a deep devotion to his characters, Dan Chaon explores the secret connections that irrevocably

link them. In the process he examines questions of identity, fate, and circumstance: Why do we become the people that we become? How do we end up stuck in lives that we never wanted? And can we change the course of what seems inevitable? In language that is both unflinching and exquisite, Chaon moves deftly between the past and the present in the small-town prairie Midwest and shows us the extraordinary lives of ordinary people. From the Hardcover edition.

Extrait 1 March 24, 1977 Jonah was dead for a brief time before the paramedics brought him back to life. He never talks about it, but it's on his mind sometimes, and he finds himself thinking that maybe it's the central fact of the rest of his life, maybe it's what set his future into motion. He thinks of the fat cuckoo clock in his grandfathers living room, the hollow thump of weights and the dissonant guitar thrum of springs as the little door opened and the bird popped out; he thinks of his own heart, which was stopped when they got to him and then suddenly lurched forward, no one knew why, it just started again right around the time they were preparing to pronounce him deceased. This was in late March 1977, in South Dakota, a few days after his sixth birthday. If his memory were a movie, the camera would begin high in the air. In a movie, he thinks, you would see his grandfathers little house from above, you would see the yellow school bus coming to a stop at the edge of the long gravel road. Jonah had been to school that day. He had learned something, perhaps several things, and he rode home in a school bus. There were papers in his canvas knapsack, handwriting and addition and subtraction tables that the teacher had graded neatly with red ink, and a picture of an Easter egg that he'd colored for his mother. He sat on a green vinyl seat near the front of the bus and didn't even notice that the bus had stopped because he was deeply interested in a hole that someone had cut in the seat with a pocketknife; he was peering into it, into the guts of the seat, which were made of metal springs and stiff white hay. Outside it was fairly sunny, and the snow had mostly melted. The exhaust from the bus's muffler drifted through the flashing warning lights, and the silent bus driver lady caused the doors to fold open for him. He didn't like the other children on the bus, and he felt that they didn't like him either. He could sense their faces, staring, as he went down the bus steps and stood on the soft, muddy berm. But in the movie you wouldn't see that. In the movie you would only see him emerging from the bus, a boy running with his backpack dragging through the wet gravel, a red stocking cap, a worn blue ski jacket, stones grinding together beneath his boots, a pleasantly rhythmic noise he was making. And you would be up above everything like a bird, the long gravel road that led from the mailbox to the house, the weeds along the ditches, the telephone poles, barbed-wire fences, railroad tracks. The horizon, the wide plain of dust and wind. Jonah's grandfathers house was a few miles outside of the small town of Little Bow, where Jonah went to school. It was a narrow, mustard-colored farmhouse with a cottonwood beside it and a spindly chokecherry bush in front. These were the only trees in view, and his grandfathers place was the only house. From time to time a train would pass by on the railroad tracks that ran parallel to the house. Then the windows would hum like the tuning fork their teacher had shown them in school. This is how sound feels, their teacher said, and let them hold their fingers near the vibrating tines. Sometimes it seemed to Jonah that everything was very small. In the center of his grandfathers bare backyard, an empty pint of cream would be the house and a line of matchbook cars, Scotch-taped end to end, would be the train. He didn't know why he liked the game so much, but he remembered playing it over and over, imagining himself and his mother and his grandfather and his grandfathers dog, Elizabeth, all of them inside the little pint container, and himself (another part of himself) leaning over them like a giant or a thundercloud, pushing his makeshift train slowly past. He didn't call to his grandfather when he came into the house that day. The door banged shut, the furniture sat silently. He could hear the television talking in his grandfathers room, so he knew his grandfather was there, dozing in the little windowless room, an addition to the house, just space enough for his grandfathers bed and a dresser, a small TV and a lamp with curlicues of cigarette smoke around them. His grandfather was propped up against some pillows, drinking beer; an old blanket, pillowed cotton, silk edges unraveling, was thrown across his grandfathers middle, an ashtray balanced on it. Tired. His grandfather worked as a janitor, he went to work early in the morning, while it was still dark. Sometimes when Jonah came home from school, his grandfather would come out of his room and tell Jonah stories or jokes, or he would complain about things, about being tired, about Jonah's mother. What's the problem with her now? Did you do something to get her mad? I didn't do anything to her! and he would swear about people that he didn't like, people who had cheated him, or maybe he would smile and call Elizabeth to him, Babygirl, babygirl, what are you doing there, does a babygirl want a piece of lunch meat does she? and Elizabeth would come clicking her nails across the floor, her bobbed tail almost vibrating as she wagged it, her eyes full of love as Jonah's grandfather crooned to her. But Jonah's grandfather didn't come out of his room that day, and Jonah dropped his bookbag to the floor of the kitchen. There was the smell of smoke, and fried

eggs, and the old food in the refrigerator. Unwashed dishes in the sink. His grandfathers door was half-closed, and Jonah sat at the kitchen table for a time, eating cereal. His mother was at work. He didnt know whether he missed her or not, but he thought of her as he sat there in the still kitchen. She worked at a place called Harmony Farm, packing eggs, she said, and the tone of her voice made him imagine dark labyrinths with rows of nests, a promenade of sad, dirty workers moving slowly through the passageways. She wouldnt talk about it when she got home. Often, she wouldnt want to talk at all, wouldnt want to be touched, would make their supper, which she herself wouldnt eat. She would go to her room and listen to old records shed had since she was in junior high, her eyes open and her hands in a praying shape beneath her cheek, her long hair spread out behind her on the pillow. He could stand there for a very long time, watching her from the edge of the doorway and she wouldnt move. The needle of the phonograph pulsed like a smooth car along the spiraling track of a record album and her eyes seemed to register the music more than anything else, her blinking coinciding with a pause or a beat. But he knew that she could see him standing there. They were looking at each other, and it was a sort of gameto try to blink when she blinked, to set his mouth in the same shape as her mouth, to hear what she was hearing. It was a sort of game to see how far he could inch into the room, sliding his feet the way a leaf opens, and sometimes he was almost to the center of the room before she finally spoke. Get out, she would say, almost dreamily. And then she would turn her face away from him, toward the wall. He thought of her as his spoon hovered over his cereal. One day, he thought, she wouldnt come home from work. Or she might disappear in the night. He had awakened a few times: footsteps on the stairs, in the kitchen, the back door opening. From the upstairs window he saw her forcing her arm into the sleeve of her coat as she walked down the driveway. Her face was strange in the pale brightness cast by the floodlights that his grandfather had installed outside the house. Her breath lifted up out of her in the cold and drifted like mist, trailing behind her as she moved into the darkness beyond the circle of porch light. We wont be staying long, she would tell Jonah sometimes. She would talk about the places where they used to live as if theyd just come to Jonahs grandfathers house for a visit, even though theyd been living there for as long as he could remember almost three years. He didnt remember much about the other places she talked about. Chicago. Denver. Fresno. Had he been to these cities? He wasnt sure. Sometimes things came in flashes and images, not really memories at all a staircase leading down, with muddy boots outside of it; a man with a fringed jacket like Davy Crockett, asleep on a couch while Jonah looked inside his open mouth; a lamp with autumn leaves patterned on it; a cement shower stall where he and his mother had washed together. Sometimes he thought he remembered the other baby, the one that had been born before him. I was very young, she told him. That was all she would tell. I was very young. I had to give it away. I remember the baby, he said once, when they were sitting together talking, when she was feeling friendly, holding him in her arms, running her fingernails lightly back and forth across his cheek. I remember the baby, he said, and her face grew stiff. She took her hand away. No, you dont, she said. Dont be stupid. You werent even born yet. She sat there for a moment, regarding him, and then she shut her eyes, her teeth tightening against one another as if the sight of him hurt her. Jesus Christ, she said. Why dont you just forget I ever told you anything. I mean, I confide in you with something thats very private, and very important, and you want to play little pretend games? Are you a baby? She sat there coldly, frowning, and began to gather and arrange her hair, ignoring him. She had long hair that reached almost to the belt-loops of her jeans. His grandfather said she looked like the country singer Crystal Gayle. Dont you think she looks pretty, Jonah? his grandfather would say when he was trying to cheer her up, but she would only smile a little, not really happy. He watched as she shook a cigarette from her pack on the coffee table and lit it. Dont look at me that way, she said. She took a sip of smoke from her cigarette, and he tried to make his expression settled and neutral, to make his face the way she might want it to be. Mom? he said. What? Where do babies go when you give them away? He wanted to make his voice sound innocent, to talk in the way a child on television might ask about Santa Claus. He wanted to pretend to be a certain type of child, to see if she might believe in it. But she didnt. Where do babies go when you give them away? she repeated, in a high, insipid voice, and she didnt look at him, she didnt think he was cute or forgivable. He watched the rustle of her long hair, her hand as she ran the head of her cigarette against the rim of the ashtray. They go to live with nice mommies, she said. After a moment shed shrugged darkly, not liking him anymore, not wanting to talk. But he did remember the baby, he thought. He and his mother had seen it at the market, being watched by a lady he didnt know. The baby was pink-skinned, and had a tiny head without hair on it and it was inside something a basket, he thought, a basket like apples came in at the grocery store. The baby was dressed in a green velvet suit with a Santas head on it, and rested on a red cushion. It moved its hands blindly, as if trying to catch air.

Look, his mother said. There's my baby! And a lady had looked at them, stiffening as his mother bent down to wave her fingers over the baby's line of vision. The lady had looked at them, smiling but also frightened, and she had spoken to Jonah sharply. Please don't touch, the lady said. Your hands are dirty. He remembered this vividly not only because of the baby but because of the lady's eyes, the way she looked at him, the sharp sound of her voice. It was the first time he really understood that there was something about him that people didn't like. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Brilliantly written American debut about the lives of two separated brothers. (The Bookseller) Mesmerising debut ... You Remind Me Of Me imparts a deeply moving empathy for lives gone sorely awry (The Times) A heartbreakingly beautiful look at the architecture of thwarted desire and the rampant destruction that minor incidents can wreak upon the seemingly most ordinary of lives. (The Spectator) 'Dan Chaon has constructed a remarkable debut novel ... You Remind Me of Me is a beautifully written exploration of the emotional paths chosen by rootless people desperate to hold on' (Literary) Remarkable ... Chaon has written an apparently claustrophobic novel that feels paradoxically large, generous and, ultimately, quite moving (Washington Post) A remarkable first novel ... Not only satisfying but devastating (Editor's Choice, Entertainment Weekly) Chaon's achievement is to rescue his characters from oblivion and make their lives seem as real as our own (New York Times Book) A Chinese box of a novel, full of hidden pleasures and surprises (Elizabeth McCracken, author of 'The Giant's House') Hypnotic ... haunting ... A lovely, insinuating book with a special staying power (New York Times Book) 'Gritty, moving and memorable' (Daily Mail) 'A remarkable first novel . . . Not only satisfying but devastating' (Calire Allfree, Metro) 'The author can make even inconsequential details seem vividly real. The result is a novel that is absorbing from beginning to end' (The Times) 'Chaon's writing is quite simply wonderful...a really good novel' (Independent on Sunday)