



Einstein's Beach House

Jacob M. Appel

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A couple adopt a depressed hedgehog; a mother is seduced by the father of her daughter's imaginary friend; a man kidnap's his ex-wife's pet turtle. In eight tragi-comic stories, *Einstein's Beach House: Stories* features ordinary men and women rising to life's extraordinary challenges.

Einstein's Beach House Details

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Author : Jacob M. Appel

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From Reader Review Einstein's Beach House for online ebook

TL says

New favorite author :)

Discovered this by chance when I stumbled upon karen's review last year.. saw this on paperbackswap and jumped on it.

Each story has a different vibe to it... some are disturbing, some are a bit out there, one of the more interesting has bit of a paranormal twist to it.

It's easy to imagine a couple of them as short films *hint hint Hollywood *

These stories resonate and stay with you after you've finished them.. some skewed moments and oddly compelling.

One story in particular had a twist to it that was refreshing, for me at least and funny in an odd way. The lie they were telling as the truth went in a direction they never expected.

Another had me rolling my eyes at one bit, not so much what the character was doing, to each his own and all that, but the way she went about it.. was mentally taking a few steps back from her.

I can't really pick a favorite from the bunch... one of those happy rare occasions I loved each and every one.

Would highly recommend, bit different but in a good way:)

*will add my ratings for each story when I get on my laptop *

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

EXCERPT: That year Lizzie's kid sister kept a list of things that were funny when they happened to other people: tarring and feathering, Peeping Toms, mad cow disease. The rare encephalopathy from which their father suffered didn't actually come from eating infected cattle, it turned out, but from a spontaneous somatic mutation - which Bill Sucram's neurologist described as 'losing the Genetic lottery' - yet the ailment was enough like mad cow that Lizzie's mother swore off animal products. Overnight Myra Sucram stopped fricasseeing duck and took to ordering exotic soy dishes from a newly opened vegan-kosher deli on Walloon Street. Her family's health consumed her: she spent mornings arguing with Bill's insurance carrier, afternoons researching manganese contamination and do it yourself dioxin tests at the public library, and evenings promising her husband and daughters that medical breakthroughs can happen overnight. She wore her smile like a shroud.

Lizzie's father resigned himself to his diagnosis. He informed the Pontefract Board of Education that he had six months to live and that he did not intend to spend them at the office. Then he composed a list of people who harbored him ill will - a shady plumber he'd sued in small claims court, his estranged step-brother in Las Vegas - and he telephoned each one to apologize. One night, the thirty-eight year old agnostic middle school principal summoned his daughters to hot cocoa at the kitchen table and announced, "I fear I've taught you girls too much grammar and not enough forgiveness." So Lizzie was mortified, but not unprepared, when her father insisted on taking them to meet the sex offender.

THE BLURB: A couple adopts a depressed hedgehog; a stranger shows up, claiming to be the father of a girl's imaginary friend; a woman kidnaps her ex-husband's turtle; a family is evicted from their home, but was it ever really theirs? Heartbreaking and hilarious, the eight stories of Einstein's Beach House examine how we deceive ourselves and others, all to arrive at something far more real.

MY THOUGHTS: I loved these stories and will be seeking out more of Mr Appel's works. I tried to limit myself to one story per day as they are so thought provoking, but was not always successful.

This is a quirky, eclectic and occasionally dark collection of stories about human nature - mostly about that "aha!" moment in our lives, when things become perfectly clear, even if only momentarily. Both Appel's stories and his characters remain with you long after you have finished reading. Highly recommended.

Thank you to author Jacob M Appel for providing a copy of Einstein's Beach House for review. All opinions expressed in this review are entirely my own personal opinions. Please refer to my Goodreads.com profile page or the 'about' page on sandysbookaday.wordpress.com for an explanation of my rating system. This review and others are also published on my blog sandysbookaday.wordpress.com <https://sandysbookaday.wordpress.com/...>

Larry H says

I know how much I love a book when I can't stop myself from devouring it in practically one sitting, although I want to savor it at the same time. And boy, did I love this one.

The eight stories in *Einstein's Beach House* are slightly quirky (but not distractingly so), somewhat moving and each at least a little bit humorous, and extremely memorable. Jacob Appel does such a great job developing his characters and the plot of each story, I honestly could see many of them developed into a full-length novel, and I'd definitely want to read those books, since I wanted more of the characters.

It honestly is hard to pick favorites, since each story was just so good, but the few that I can't stop thinking about right now are: "Paracosmos," in which a married couple is worried that their daughter is obsessed with her imaginary friend—and then the girl's father shows up; "La Tristesse Des Herissons," which tells the story of a couple whose relationship hits a bit of a snag when they adopt a depressed hedgehog; "Limerence," in which a man looks back on his crush on his much more worldly next-door neighbor; "The Rod of Asclepius," which tells the story of a young girl caught up in her father's acts of revenge; and the title story, in which a family tries to make hay of a typo in a travel guide, only to have the tables turned on them.

I had never heard of Jacob Appel until two friends on Goodreads raved about his writing, and this story collection in particular. They couldn't have been more on target. He is such an engaging writer, and even though the subject matter of these stories isn't quite your everyday stuff, the stories are tremendously human (and often humane), and really pack both a literary and an emotional punch. I'll definitely be picking up some of Appel's other books, but in the meantime, I highly recommend you pick this collection up. You won't regret it.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

Rebecca McNutt says

I'm really grateful to have had the opportunity to read and review *Einstein's Beach House*, because it was one of the best short story anthologies I've ever read! This book brought so much imagination and excitement to my March Break; it's full of unforgettable characters, vivid detail and imagery, and a light at the end of every tunnel. Most books don't have the kind of originality that *Einstein's Beach House* has to offer, it had just the right amount of humor, tragedy and imagination that made it really intriguing to read.

My favorite of the stories was *La Tristesse Des Herissons*, I loved it and don't think I'll ever forget it! Orion was adorable, and it was a really different but loveable story unlike any other. All the stories were, each one has its own different element that makes it in a class all its own.

I highly recommend this book; I loved it and I'll be telling all my friends and family about it! If you haven't read it yet, it's really worth it, believe me! It's a brilliant book and it's one of my favorites on my shelf.

Dawn says

What a delightful little gem this book of eight short stories turned out to be. I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway and I'm happy I did. Each story was better, quirkier and more darkly humorous than the last. The author has a wonderful, and eccentric imagination, and I kept chuckling to myself with the way each story progressed. A depressed hedgehog who is taken by its distraught owner to a pet psychologist; a man who sells tickets to tour 'Einstein's Beach House' after a AAA travel guide mistakenly prints his home on the beach is such the place; and my favorite, titled 'Paracosmos', where a mother and father are worried about their young daughter's imaginary friend and her insistence on her constant presence. Then, the imaginary friend's father shows up at the door one day and he and the mother begin an affair. That one still has me scratching my head in a fantastical way. I look forward to reading more of Jacob Appel's work.

Note: the author has some copies of his books available via PDF. Click on his author profile and he gives his email address. I emailed him and he quickly sent me a copy of his other book of short stories which I was able to download to my kindle. Not sure what else he has available but it's worth emailing him. He is obviously doing what he can to promote his books. I hope more people read this! 4 stars.

Mary says

This collection of stories was highly readable and held my interest throughout. Most were comical, yet darkly moving. All were a little strange and dreamlike. Characters look back on strange occurrences during a pocket of time when the world is almost as it seems. Almost.

As a people-watcher, I began to notice a pattern with Appel's writing after reading a few of these stories. As they were introduced, many characters were frozen for a moment and their futures laid out, before being brought back to the present. It highlighted the movement of time, the years flowing by, and the way we all have our own stories, even the minor characters that flit in and out of our lives momentarily. When mentioning this nuance in Appel's writing, my fiancé pointed out that the title of the collection was perhaps thoughtfully chosen; the connectivity of us all and the continuity of time.

Standout stories: *Einstein's Beach House*, *Paracosmos*, *Limerence*, and *Hue and Cry*.

Pearl Angeli says

Einstein's Beach House surprised me! I didn't know what to expect from this book and from this author but the overall impact it brought me was beyond my expectations. This book consists of 8 short stories, each with different themes but all in all, coming up with one thing -- **life experiences**.

The writing style of Jacob M. Appel is so impressive. He has this unique plot and great, three-dimensional characterization and he laces everything with humor and emotional conflict that even if each story was short, I felt as if I was reading a regular-length book.

I made a brief review for each story because I was too overwhelmed with everything in this book and here they are:

1. Hue and Cry

This is the first short story of *Einstein's Beach House*. It's a dark and twisted story, with an underlying sensitive issue that centers a man who is a sex offender. How he was treated by the people around him totally describes harsh reality. I don't know exactly what to feel about this but I can say that the author very well establishes a great reality-based story.

2. La tristesse des hérisson

This second short story held a very heavy topic which was handled perfectly with humor. It's about a couple who adopted a hedgehog. Sounds a bit normal but the moment they took the hedgehog home, their relationship slowly went downhill because of some psychological issues that were focused on the hedgehog. If you read this book blindly, you will appreciate the hidden message the author was conveying. This short story is beautiful and gripping. It's psychological and an eye-opener. We tend to blame other people for the fault which is entirely done by ourselves and act this defense mechanism which is so-called *displacement*.

3. Strings

"It's much better to not be okay when you ought to be fine, than to be perfectly content when you really should be falling to pieces."

Well this third short story hits home. It's about a 40 year-old woman who was approached by her ex-lover who's a musician, for a favor. At first I didn't get the message behind the story but when I reached the ending-- wow! The story sent a deep, powerful message that hit straight to the core. It's about defining the value of success and failure and how each person's approach towards these things vary. It's also more about moving on and forgiveness.

4. Limerence

The fourth short story of this book completely stole my heart. It's heartbreaking. It's a flashback story about a teenage boy and a girl whose friendship started right when they were in high school. Despite the girl's imperfections and issues in life, the boy slowly developed feelings for her, which was unfortunately not returned due to the girl's circumstances and misfortunes. I love how this short-length of a story felt longer than I've thought. There was so much emotional depth in this story. The melancholy tone also made me feel like I'm reading a Nicholas Sparks book. From the beginning up to the end, I was pleasantly moved because of the great characterization the author was able to distinguish and the emotions being poured that tugged at my heartstrings.

5. Einstein's Beach House

Now this fifth story is more about the things that usually happen in the family household. It's about a couple with two kids who live in a beachfront house which was perceived as **Albert Einstein's** beach house. As they later on made the house a source of their income through the tourists that usually visit because of their curiosity, they later on learned that in fact, the house was originally owned by Einstein's niece. What made this short story brilliant was how the author emphasized the essence of *sentimental value* for a particular thing and how a person values childhood and family relationships. The ending of this short story was so touching!

6. The Rod of Asclepius

By far, this sixth short story is my most favorite of all. I loved the dark theme in which a father and a daughter bonded through some twisted kind of activity. In this story, the father was introduced by the author in a very mysterious way. He pretended to be a doctor whenever he enters the hospital and when he's inside a particular room, he injects random patients, basically killing them. But he always did it together with her daughter who was a seven year-old. As the girl grew up, the memory of what happened still lingered and even served as a traumatic experience to her. This is such a brilliant, dark story. It's cringe-worthy and as usual, very well-written. It also gives a reader something to ponder in the end.

7. Sharing the Hostage

This short story is particularly funny! It's about a divorced woman who wanted her tortoise, which was already in the hands of her ex-husband, back. The ex-couple didn't have a child but the way they value the turtle, sharing a joint custody, as if it's their own child, was so hilarious and strange. The woman and her lover planned to abduct the tortoise from her ex-husband but when they've already had it, they realized that maybe after all, they shouldn't have took it because it won't survive in their planned trip. All throughout the story, I was laughing because of its unrealistic but hilarious approach. In the end, I realized that the story itself shows the importance of giving value to a certain thing-- no matter how small or big it is.

8. Paracosmos

The last short story of *Einstein's Beach House* is charming. The story centers around a small family consisting a couple and a daughter. The daughter had an imaginary friend whom the couple thought was alarming. This short story is realistic in a way because having an imaginary friend is part of childhood. The message behind the story was also amazing. It emphasizes importance of family bonding and of course, the importance of fidelity.

As a whole, Einstein's Beach House is a masterpiece and a real gem! I am so thankful to have been given a copy of this book from the author because it's a book that I will forever treasure. The contents are all unique, amazing, and very well-written, in a can't-put-it-down way. It's a powerful anthology that explores every sensible and even psychological aspect of life. If you want a wholesome, thought-provoking reads, I highly

recommend this anthology!

Rating:

Bam says

Each of the eight short stories in this collection focus on an incident, situation or ethical dilemma that Appel's all-too-human characters must deal with.

In 'Hue and Cry,' a young girl confronts her dying father's frailty as he pursues an ideal of forgiveness in the face of public outcry. In 'La Tristesse Des Herrissons,' a couple deals with a depressed pet hedgehog and their own idiosyncrasies. In 'Strings,' a rabbi finds herself entangled in the requests of her former lover, a cellist. In 'Limerence,' a young teen has a crush on an unsuitable young woman, a crush that never quite leaves him as he grows to be a family man. In 'Einstein's Beach House,' a man capitalizes on a typographical error but finds his lies come back to bite him in a neat plot twist. 'The Rod of Asclepius' is Appel's most haunting tale, told by the daughter of a man who seeks revenge for wife's tragic death. 'Sharing the Hostage' is another deranged pet story: a divorcing couple shares custody of their pet tortoise, Fred; the woman's new boyfriend would love to set Fred free. And in 'Paracosmos,' my favorite story of the collection, a lonely young girl has a new best friend whom her parents think is imaginary until the girl's father shows up on their doorstep. What is real and what is not? And what does the answer reveal about them as a family?

Many thanks to Jacob Appel for providing me with a copy of this collection of eight short stories to read and review. I have become a fan of his writing after reading Millard Salter's Last Day, Appel's most recent book. I highly recommend both of these books and this author to my goodreads friends. You won't be disappointed.

Melki says

This is a truly excellent collection of stories by award-winning author Jacob Appel. I was impressed by his previous work, Scouting for the Reaper, but the eight stories here seem even more honed and polished, and I can find no fault with any of them.

Like George Saunders, Appel delights in taking a mild-mannered characters who are used to doing only what common sense dictates, flinging weird circumstances at them and then describing how they deal with the intrusion. Here you will meet men whose love-interests are obsessed with pet tortoises and hedgehogs, a man whose money-making scheme leads to catastrophic results, and a rabbi who finds there are strings attached when she lets a former beau hold a concert for 400 cellos in her sanctuary.

Everyone has problems to deal with and their solutions often have unexpected consequences.

My favorite story, *Paracosmos*, concerns a family who is deeply affected by the daughter's imaginary friend. It was humorous and unpredictable with an absolutely delicious last line consisting of three perfectly chosen words. Simply wonderful!

Appel gets better and better with each book and I honestly can't wait for the next one.

Jeanette says

These are entertaining and entrap personality and nuance with few words. That I LOVE. So refreshing to see glimpses of these characters being themselves in such depth of context to their situations. Without the verbose word count hubris of description that has become so endemic in fiction in the last 4 or 5 years, IMHO. If it isn't alternating narrators its long term verbose copy that belongs in a psychiatric session.

The only flaw I found for my own reading that in order to be humorous, and all of them WERE (even within reversal or sorrow combined)- is that at times, I felt the "try too hard" over the top gimmick became somewhat embedded. But others like that in majority, I guess. Not I. It might be that all the people of my life have been simple people who would never go to such complex connotations. My people would have YOU committed if you were paying \$400 a crack for therapy of hedgehog owning, for instance. Metaphors be damned.

All of them (stories) are different in slant, which is terrific. And most are 5 star. But as good as they were, there were a couple of times I questioned some aspect of stated "fact" at the ending or emotive inference. But we are all different, and different children have a "different take" on parental role models. Some siblings, nearly the opposite inference by watching the same thing!! So who am I to question whether visible fighting is good or bad or needed or wanted!

Very entertaining and he sure can write. And he knows people are often self-absorbed and finicky in the modern world.

As I am a nearly impossible audience for short stories, take this as a 5 star from most anyone else.

Elyse says

FANTASTIC STORIES! *****UPDATE: What happened to my STARS??? I rated this book 5 stars when I read it. Also--I ordered "The Biology of Luck" from Amazon --a LONG time ago....hm?? where is it? I must go do some research work!

A touch of Jonathan Tropper ...

A touch of Nick Hornby...

A larger touch of Etgar Keret, the Israeli author...

Mostly ... A touch of JACOB M. APPEL!!!!

These creative -hilarious -heartbreaking -complex -entertaining stories will satisfy any reader!

The flawed characters are written with compassion! You'll think about them --(debate choices for them of what they may or may not have done different).

When the last sentence comes at the end of each story you'll feel the punch deep in your gut. ...As these stories have TONS of FEELING!

Human Absurtyat its BEST!

Congratulations to the Jacob M Appel on a terrific book! I look forward to reading anything else he writes! A wonderful writer and storyteller!

Mary Beth *Traveling Sister* says

I was actually asked by the author if I would be interested in reading an ARC of his book for an honest review! My answer of course was yes of course! I usually do not read short stories because they usually aren't so good. These stories really surprised me, I was not expecting these short stories to be so good!

The stories were to me daily life moments when everything goes wrong. This book was filled with anger, bad luck, worry, and doom. They are very heart broken stories. Some of them I found to be a little humorous especially the depressed hedgehog story.

This is filled with your darkest moments. Have you ever had a day where every thing goes wrong, of course we all have. When you have one of those days, read this book and you will probably laugh out loud.

The story that I thought was the saddest was about a family that was evicted from their own home, but find out that they never even owned it to begin with.

I really did love this collection of short stories. I even liked the characters. I will be reading more books by this author. I consider myself lucky and so happy that I got this book. Jacob Appel Thank You very much! I appreciated this.

Sanjay Gautam says

Einstein's Beach House by Jacob M Appel is a collection of 8 short stories. The author has a unique voice which clearly echoes in his stories. Each story has its own unique flavor and taste but has one common thread among them - that they are both funny and tragic (tragic, to some extent). Each story keeps you hooked, and the author has written such that you get so engrossed in it that it feels the story is happening around you, and you are there and watching it. He takes from everyday life situations something unusual and makes a story out of it from nowhere, and leave you spellbound.

HUE AND CRY: It is the first story in the book, and was quite moving. It did not made an impact when I finished reading it. But it was after a day or two that I realized it had many levels to it, and that it evoked nostalgia with a flavor. It was the father of the narrator that seemed to be a great character, and actually he was, but every human being is vulnerable and has his shortcomings. And it was the climax of the story that shows this flaw in human nature.

LA TRISTESSE DES HÉRISSEMENTS: The translation of the title is THE SADNESS OF HEDGEHOGS. A couple adopts a hedgehog, instead of having a baby. This hedgehog turns out to be a nightmare for the husband, who unwillingly submits to the whims of his wife. And it turns out that hedgehog is depressed (actually it's his wife that finds that out) and that triggers a chain reaction, which acts as adding fuel to the fire, and sours the already soured relationship, further. But it was funny in a way (from the point of view of the boy); and it turns out the girl was actually depressed.

STRINGS: The story starts with when an ex-lover of a lady, who is married now, ask for her help; and she unwillingly helps him, and this created an inner turmoil in her and she gets irritated and furious over it, unconsciously. This story was very beautiful, and had an emotional depth to it, and shows the strange yet soothing warmth of a loving relationship between a wife and her husband. I was hooked on this story, and really liked it.

LIMERENCE: It was just perfect, a perfect short story that reminded me of Chekhov and Tagore. I was hooked from the first line, and finished it in one sitting. It's a bitter-sweet story like all the others so far. It's a story told in reminiscence by a boy about a girl, how he fell for her despite knowing that she is not virgin and changes her boy friends as regularly as one would change clothes.

Einstein's Beach House: There is a deep connection with Einstein's Beach House in the story, which is the ultimate cause of their fortune, and above all - for their misery.

Zoeytron says

And now, for something completely different, sit yourself down with Jacob Appel's book of short stories. Refreshing in their originality, this collage contains bits and pieces of life, truths, and some startling final sentences that will give you pause before going on to the next story.

The challenges of dating when you are older, a coddled turtle, a depressed hedgehog, and why it is always a good idea to carry a spare umbrella. They don't grow on trees, you know. 'So many falsehoods have been concealed with so much truth.' I just loved that thought.

A copy of this book was provided to me by the author. Thank you for the opportunity to read such an unusual and occasionally unsettling collection.

karen says

wow. that was surprising. damn, damn good stories here.

this is one of those books that i grabbed when it came across my desk just because i *could*. an unfamiliar author on a small press, "maybe it'll be a new discovery" kind of thing. i grab those books like popcorn, and they just sit on my desk, as my stacks of greediness accumulate and make me feel bad about myself as a reader. and then months later the author contacted me, asking me if i would like a copy of his book. i get a ton of requests, and i have to turn down 99% of them, because i just don't have the time to read anything except the things i read for that program-thing. but i had a break of A WHOLE MONTH, and i thought, "well, i already have it, and it's short and i'll earn some goodreads-author karma points and do someone a favor before indulging in this stack of books i have been drooling over, waiting for a break from program."

but shit - i ended up doing a favor to myself. because this book surprised me. despite the double-danger of "i don't know you" and "you are short stories," i genuinely loved this collection. it has a millhauser quality to it, but it isn't magical realism at all - it toes the line to where it *seems* like it *could* veer into magical realism, but it stops just before it does. except for the last story. maybe. and it definitely isn't grit lit, which is the other place my taste lives. it's just solid, well-crafted short story writing - a little dark without being sinister, a little melancholy without being broody - it toes that line in all things. it's very restrained. which is not to say that it is boring or "safe," but it's like fishing - the reader is given just enough line to feel untethered, but the author is always in control. of the 8 stories, there are 3 that i think are absolutely perfect. for me and short stories, that's statistically improbable. and yet.

i totally recommend this collection. and now i wonder what other gems are buried on my desk...

Hue and Cry (perfect story #1)

in which rex benbow - convicted sex offender - moves into thirteen-year-old lizzie's neighborhood and she finds herself caught between two powerful forces: her father, whose serious illness has taught him to face the world with forgiveness and so takes lizzie and her younger sister over to welcome rex to the neighborhood, and her rebellious best friend julia, who wants to break into rex's house and explore.

both of these are pretty shitty ideas, it turns out.

this story is so good. there is a density to it that really excited me. there are so many quiet layers to this one - familial duty, the lovingly competitive nature of girl-friendships, the awkwardness of poorly considered but well-intentioned gestures, the defeated exhaustion of someone under constant scrutiny, the moment of realization that even a father's power has limits.

and just enough foreshadowing to supply closure without feeling overhandled. a perfect opening to this collection.

La Tristesse Des Hérissons

this story has a wackier premise - a couple already experiencing some emotional and physical distancing adopts a hedgehog named orion that turns out to be suffering from depression. adeline devotes herself to orion's care, taking elaborate measures to treat him under the instruction of a veterinary psychiatrist. josh reluctantly follows suit, hoping to restore his relationship, as it's pretty clear that adeline is the one who is truly depressed. it's a tight and desperate story that edges towards farce while remaining dark and haunted. it's a good balance and it made me really want a hedgehog. so i can make a boat out of him.

Strings

Rabbi Cynthia Felder was newly married, and in her pulpit only six months, when a former lover asked to borrow the sanctuary.

this seems to be a simple story on the surface, but it has delicious tension. i had no idea where it was headed, on its journey through faith and fidelity and rage and the fine line between doing a mitzvah and being taken advantage of, or opening yourself up to woozy nostalgia. this one's got a quiet depth.

Limerence

sad and gorgeous and true. the one who got away and was never truly had. the adoration of a charismatic and damaged fireball who never stayed still long enough to benefit from it. the lack of communication between the heart wanting what it wants and the head that totally knows better. the linger. just lovely. this one is not officially perfect, but it comes close.

Einstein's Beach House

a get-financially-solvent-quick scheme goes bad, a family falls apart. not my favorite in the collection, but there were a lot of really great lines and observations of the family dynamic. it's a little "surface-only" when compared to the rest of the stories in the collection, but it's still a good piece.

The Rod of Asclepius (perfect story #2)

dear god yes. this one. this is a truly original and psychologically ass-kicking story.

"She knows," says Aunt Henrietta. "But I don't think she really understands."

it is not possible to understand the things that people will do when grief takes over. some people react more ... elaborately than others. there was jaw-dropping by me. if i had a heart to break, this one would have done it,

Sharing the Hostage

this story would be good friends with *La Tristesse Des Hérissons*. couples and their pets: what happens when they break up, and what happens to a new relationship when a woman loves a turtle she shares with her ex. (view spoiler)

Paracosmos (perfect story #3)

this one is the most jonathan carroll-y/steven millhauser-y of them all. and it is spectacular. it's the only one that ventures into the magical realism realm (ooooorr doooooeesss iiiitt?) but it is just perfect. dark charms and ambiguity abound. two huge thumbs up for this one.

a wonderful surprise of a book, and i'm so glad i put mira grant on hold. (sorry, mira grant - i'm coming!!!)

Debbie says

4.5 stars

I think this secret gem of a book has the power to convert short-story-shy readers. It's that good. Such a satisfying read! It's one of those books where the first sentence of each story compels you to continue. Yum yum, read on, my mind instructed me. I kept getting sucked in.

Here's the opening line of one story, called Paracosmos. Who could resist?

"Leslie traced their difficulties to before the parrot-fever scare, to before even the chimney sweep's scrotum, to the summer night when her husband proposed naming the baby Quarantina."

The stories are off-beat and spectacular. There are some that are pretty far out: a couple adopts a depressed hedgehog, a woman and her boyfriend fight over a pet turtle, a woman has a fling with the father of her daughter's imaginary friend. The two animal stories were a little much for me, a little too quirky, but I still enjoyed them. Even the super realistic stories have intriguing characters with unusual dilemmas and tense interactions. You don't know where the story is going, so there's some cool suspense as well. Some stories are sort of funny—not in a ha-ha way, but it's sly humor that's sometimes mixed with tragedy. It's a pro who can combine humor and tragedy successfully, and Appel shows he's got the stuff.

My favorite story is *The Rod of Asclepius*. First off, no, I don't like the title, and yes, I had to look it up. (Fact download: Asclepius is the god of medicine in Greek and Roman religion and mythology.) I sort of resent having to look it up, and I'm not even sure how to pronounce it. I think I'd have trouble telling friends they just have to read *The Rod of Asclepius*. I can hear them say, "Huh? Repeat that please." I'd struggle to spit it out, embarrassed and annoyed. That question, of course, would be followed by, "Huh? What does it mean?" And then I'd have to recite the Wikipedia entry when really I just want to gush about the story. Anyway, it's about a widower who drags his daughter on mysterious trips to hospitals. The ending is fantastic. It's one of those stories that I won't forget, and that's pretty rare with short stories, at least for me. I often have this great feeling when I finish a short story collection, but I have trouble remembering the plots and just what made me feel so good. There are at least two other stories in the book that I know I'll remember too.

A couple of the stories have ambiguous endings—something that bugs the hell out of me. The stories are so grand, though, that I forgive the author for it. Sometimes I think ambiguous endings are a cop-out, like the author is saying, "Hm...I don't know how to end this, so you just go ahead and decide how you want it to end....that's cool." I don't want to decide what happens next, thank you, I want you to finish it, author. It's your job to tell me a complete story! Anyway, lots of people enjoy ambiguity; it just doesn't work for me.

A silly complaint: The damn paperback feels yucky, like it's covered in slightly sticky dust. If it's supposed to be velvety, there's definitely something wrong with my sense of touch. For me it's a quiet version of fingernails on a chalkboard. Drove me nuts; I couldn't stand picking the book up, even though I loved what was inside. I'm now sort of used to it, but I still feel the need to wash the imaginary dust off my hands each time I hold the book.

The author offered to send me this book, a request that always gets my dander up because of its pushiness. But in this case, I am so glad he did. What a treat! His bio says that among other things, he's a doctor and a lawyer (and Indian chief? I wouldn't doubt it!). What an amazing genius! His writing is just impeccable. How does he find the time to do all that he does? How can he be a great writer and have all these other talents? I'm in awe. I'll be checking out his other books, that is a certainty.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

A few weeks ago I noticed that a couple of my GR friends, Karen and Mary Beth, had both read and reviewed this collection of short stories and given it highly positive reviews. I was all, "Hey! I love short stories!" even though since finishing my English B.A. the vast majority of the short stories I've read have been of the SF/fantasy variety. So I brashly sent a PM to the author, Jacob Appel, asking him if he'd be interested in sending me his book for review, and he very kindly said yes, and sent me an honest-to-goodness paperback copy rather than the ebook I was expecting, which is just one more thing that endeared him to me.

There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt.

-- Erma Bombeck

The eight stories in this collection explore this thin line, and the humor and pain in the lives and the relationships of ordinary people. Sometimes I would be smiling right up to the time the story gave me a gut punch of despair. In other stories I could feel hope shining through the pain. All of the stories were thought-provoking and disturbed my complacency.

"Hue and Cry" - Two teenage girls: one audacious and reckless, the other anxious to please her friend. A sex offender in the neighborhood. Vocally incensed neighbors. A dying father trying to teach his daughter about forgiveness. The pieces add up to both less and more than you might expect.

"La Tristesse Des Herissons" (the sadness of hedgehogs) - a man and his live-in girlfriend adopt a hedgehog, Orion, which promptly develops depression and other mental conditions--or does it?--that the girlfriend insists on having treated by a very expensive specialist. The boyfriend thinks this is ridiculous but is (mostly) biting his tongue because his girlfriend is so wrapped up in this. A little transference? One of the funniest stories in the book, but it was killing me at the same time.

"Strings" - Beware of former lovers asking favors. The ending of this story was a paradigm-shifter. So good.

"Limerance" - An ode to the girl who got away, who was never really the boy's at all, who probably would have been terrible for the boy if she'd ever given him the time of day. A great exploration of teenage relationships and unrequited crushes.

Einstein's Beach House" - Another tragicomedy, or comical tragedy. A family claims to be living in a beach house once owned by Albert Einstein, and then everything gets upended. I'm still a little confused about what really happened here...

"The Rod of Asclepius" - A 6 year old daughter accompanies her widowed father as he seeks revenge for his wife's death.

What my six-year-old self doesn't realize then, though it is clear to me now, is that this may be the first time my father has left our apartment in several months, that I am witnessing the man emerge from a winter-long twilight of raw anger... "Are you ready to change the world, princess?" he asks. At that moment, I am suddenly persuaded that the world does indeed require changing, that the entire cosmos yearns for radical transformation.

Heartbreaking in so many ways.

"Sharing the Hostage" - More animal humor, as a desert tortoise named Fred becomes the center of attention between a divorcing couple and the wife's new boyfriend. Orion and Fred would get along well, I think. Fred is a placid soul who would probably help even out Orion's jags.

"Paracosmos" - Imaginary friends can become a little too real. Or are they real?

Jacob Appel's stories are well-written and touching. I highly recommend this book to readers who appreciate tragi-comical stories that raise questions with no easy answers.

ETA: After thinking about this for several more days, I realized that these stories are really sticking with me. That's one of my main criteria for a 5-star read, so I'm upping my rating from 4 stars to 5. These stories won't be everyone's cuppa tea, but those who like this type of literature will really love them.

Content advisory: Occasional F-bombs, dysfunctional marriages, disturbing relationships.

?Karen says

3.5

Einstein's Beach House is a collection of quirky short stories concerning a variety of ethical issues. Some have left their impressions on me; others I can't even remember anymore. The title story was one of the memorable ones -- a transposition of numbers in the address where Albert Einstein spent his summer vacations leads one homeowner to profit off the error, and then, well, I won't say what happens next but it leaves you wondering.

La Tristesse des Hèrissons, (Translated: The Sadness of Hedgehogs): In the Steven King book I am currently reading, a high school English teacher offered up that teenagers, after slogging through the required course readings, use three words to describe them: "This is stupid."

Well, sometimes that critique just fits. Here, a young couple adopt a hedgehog for a pet. It seems depressed; it goes on Prozac prescribed by a psychiatrist. Enough said. I know other reviewers loved this one, so maybe I wasn't in the mood.

Also under that category might go the last story, *Paracosmos*, a Twilight Zone - ish tale of an imaginary friend whose father shows up at the door. Original, yes!

The Rod of Asclepius would make for an interesting novel, I thought. *Limerence* was pretty good, as was *Sharing the Hostage*, about a divorcee with visitation rights to her pet tortoise (much funnier than the hedgehog story). I didn't understand many of the story titles and had to look up their meanings. So my vocabulary has been expanded with these words I'll probably never see again in my lifetime, unless I forget those too. Which is likely.

So some good ones here and at least one stupid one. Better than average overall.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"I insert the bevel and draw back the plunger. I know that the syringe contains more than sodium chloride-that even as the toxic contents fill my father's veins, he is sharing with me his final gift: the horror and thrill of saving lives."

Reading this collection of stories reminded me that I don't read enough short stories. I keep hearing that people are becoming more interested in short story collections because they fit so well with our abbreviated attention spans, busy schedules, and our tweet/text diminutive information needs.

Who has time to read a whole novel anyway?

Well, me for one.

Just because I make the time to read novels doesn't mean that I should forgo the stepchild of publishing...the short story collection. After all, I'm not allowed to discriminate against short people why therefore should I be allowed to snub stubby stories.

I can't tell you how many people, when they find out that I read, say, as if it is an original thought usually accompanied by a heavy sigh while violin music softly plays in the background: "I wish I had time to read." I stifle a yawn and usually either ignore them or say:

"Everyone has time to read. You just choose to do other things."

The impression that people have about reading is that it is something you do when you have **ABSOLUTELY** nothing else to do. I don't know how many times, when I'm sitting at the auto dealership waiting on my car or on a plane or on a train or on a park bench reading, someone will start talking to me because obviously if I've resorted to reading I must be **BORED OUT OF MY FRILLING MIND**. So why not replace Fyodor Dostoevsky, Raymond Chandler, or Virginia Woolf with idle chit chat about the weather or their goiter issues or their granddaughter's exploits on the soccer field.

The point I was leading up to is that now, instead of giving my typical snarky reply that just makes people even less interested in reading because who wants to be like the intellectual a\$\$hole who just made them feel like a dumba\$\$, I will pull out my phone and queue up Amazon and say order this damn book... **YOU** have time for this book.

The "I wish I had time to read" tax will now be the cost of this book. I will look at their wristwatch and their shoes and make a quick determination if they have to buy a brand new copy. If they are wearing a t-shirt that looks like it has been washed on stones in a river or shoes that are held together by twine or a sundial on their wrist, I might point out the fact that they can buy used ones for pennies.

There are eight stories in this collection, not even double digits, so again if **TIME** is an issue, you can have this book read easily within a week by just reading one story a day and two on Sunday (this slender volume fits easily in the middle of a Bible or a hymnal). They are Cheeveresque with a little T. C. Boyle hot sauce added to the mix. I didn't really pick up any Raymond Carver, but then it has been awhile since I've read Carver, so he might have been standing in the shadows between sentences, and I simply missed him. I do wonder if Jacob M. Appel has a time machine and set it to take him back to Iowa City, Iowa, in 1973 to have sex with Cheever, smoke weed with Boyle, and drink shots with Carver.

That M. in the middle of his name looks suspicious, like maybe it stands for Mathematical, Mechanical, or Machine.

The thing of it is books are time machines, so Appel didn't have to build one. The pages of the books that Cheever, Boyle, and Carver all wrote will take all of us forwards and backwards in time without ever necessitating that we leave our armchairs. He didn't need a DeLorean; he only needed a bus that could take him down to the nearest bookstore or public library.

These stories are about redemption, the first love that we are usually fortunate to escape, time shared turtles, illness withering the strength of a father, deaf-mute sex so as not to further disturb a disturbed hedgehog, of someone so happy at what **IS** instead of what could have been, a bit of scheming with Einstein, imaginary lovers, and a daughter caught in a whirlpool of her father's madness.

All the stories are strong, but three of them are really something special. I was going to parcel these elite eight out over several days, but frankly I couldn't leave them alone. I kept putting aside the novels that were bristling with bookmarks and post-it notes and indulged myself by reading another Appel story. I soon ran out of pages and was eyeing the empty white pages at the back of the book in much the same manner in which I peer into the empty bottle of a fine single malt scotch...satisfied, but looking for more. Highly Recommended!!

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Ray says

An interesting volume of eight short stories. The tales are quirky, drawing you deceptively in to a "normal" situation only to veer off into something unsettling or odd.

I particularly liked the story where a morose hedgehog (who can tell?) becomes the catalyst for the unravelling of a doomed relationship - leaving the protagonists dripping blood fifty feet up on a precarious ledge.

Worth a read
