



## The Speech of Angels

*Sharon Maas*

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# **The Speech of Angels**

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How far can a special ability take you from your roots without damaging or destroying you?

Jyothi is growing up on the streets of Bombay when she is rescued by an affluent Western couple, their contribution to the starving of India. But she soon finds adapting to the orderly, middle-class English way of life, to school, and to rules and regulations hard. She feels a misfit.

But then, by chance, it is discovered that she has a rare musical talent. Words might never be easy but music flows from her. The delicate girl, with her extraordinary looks and her unique talent, takes the world by storm. And the rootless Indian waif, Jyothi, becomes the international superstar, Jade.

But she – and her family – discover the burdens of fame too, and Jyothi becomes torn between the urge to re-find her original roots and wanting to become that western girl, with that lifestyle, those men, those values. And running through her mind is the vision of a high, light room, looking out over green hills, a man's clear, candid gaze with the memory of a music of enchantment.

## **The Speech of Angels Details**

Date : Published 2004 by Harper Collins (first published 2002)

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Author : Sharon Maas

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## From Reader Review The Speech of Angels for online ebook

### Norah says

I found this novel very sweetly written, but underlying the sweetness was an insight into the possibility of doing good with the best intentions, not understanding the possible long-term psychological effects on the subject. Here is something I copied from Amazon:

Jyothi is growing up on the streets of Bombay when she is rescued by an affluent Western couple, their contribution to the starving of India. But she soon finds adapting to the orderly, middle-class English way of life, to school, and to rules and regulations hard. She feels a misfit. But then, by chance, it is discovered that she has a rare musical talent. Words might never be easy but music flows from her. The delicate girl, with her extraordinary looks and her unique talent, takes the world by storm. And the rootless Indian waif, Jyothi, becomes the international superstar, Jade. But she - and her family - discover the burdens of fame too, and Jyothi becomes torn between the urge to re-find her original roots and wanting to become that western girl, with that lifestyle, those men, those values. And running through her mind is the vision of a high, light room, looking out over green hills, a man's clear, candid gaze with the memory of a music of enchantment. The Speech of Angels, set in India, Germany and Britain, is a moving, emotional story of a remarkable girl, her loves and life, which looks at not only at the price of fame, particularly for a child-star, but at the pleasures and pitfalls of adapting across cultures and continents.

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### Jo says

i agree with most of the reviews here - it does start really well, but near the end especially it loses something...in essence it is a lovely fairy tale for modern times, the central character jyothi is rescued from a life in the bombay slums (making me think of slumdog millionaire) by two well-meaning westerners and follows her life until she is brought back to her roots...her lifestory brought to mind a russian doll with successive layers encasing previous experiences - the happy child in an Indian village mesmerized by a sitar, the dancing slum child, the distressed orphan, a new life in Germany, etc...jyothi's gift is for music and i think i picked this up on amazon as a link from 'an equal music' by vikram seth - this novel is more 'female' being written by a woman and having a girl as the main character, but covers a lot of the same magic, both books having a talented violinist as the central character - music is at the heart of sharon maas' story, it is the speech of angels and i will try out her other books sometime

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### Rebecca Stonehill says

This was the first book of Sharon Maas's that I have read and I was hugely impressed and can't wait to read her other novels, especially 'The Small Fortune of Dorothea Q' which is to be published shortly. This novel starts with the fascinating premise of a young girl living in a Bombay slum who is chanced upon by a Western couple who decide they want to adopt her and take her away from India. They do so, but it is the cost of doing this that the novel deals with so well as the young girl grows and tries to grasp her elusive identity and merge this with her special musical talent. This was a highly readable, enjoyable book and I would definitely recommend it.

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## Christy says

I just want to finish reading it, this book really enveloped me, I like it so much. It made my mind blow up!

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## Perry Whitford says

Its title taken from a Thomas Carlyle quote about music, the story starts when a five year old daughter of low caste hears a sitar playing in the house of the family her parents serve, a sound like a "*soul welling with wonder*".

A life long passion is formed in that moment, but it takes a mixture of tragedy and good fortune for the young Jyothi to realise her musical dreams, a rags to riches tale that moves from the slums of India to the concert halls of the world.

Jack and Monika are a young couple who visit India to find a viable establishment for a German christian charity to support. They have been together ten years and have been unsuccessfully trying to start their own family.

They become attached to the street child Jyothi when she responds to Jack's guitar playing, and when her mother is killed in a traffic accident they ignore all the advice and set out to adopt her, saving her from the streets for a life with them in Germany.

The prologue was a pretty effecting scene, the young girl being called irrevocably to the music, her adoption and insertion into a completely different culture offered much as a premise. Unfortunately it was all downhill into cliche and platitude from there, slowly at first but gathering momentum all the time until by the end the rate of descent was so emphatic the temptation to bail out was almost unbearable.

Jack and Monika are a shockingly dull couple, so obviously badly matched that it made their adoption of Jyothi seem almost irresponsible despite her straightened circumstances. Yet the most tension Maas could bring to bare in their unsuitable relationship was over unbuckled seat belts and carelessly discarded clothes.

Monika in particular is a horrid cliche of humorless teutonic practicality, so much so that when she says something crass about remedial classes it paves the way for her to be discarded without loss.

As for Jyothi, for all her extraordinary beginnings of poverty, tragedy and blessedness, which become compounded by further tragedy in her teenage years, she emerges as nothing more than a feather-headed diva of the stupidest, most adolescent kind.

Initially as a child we are only given flashes of her interior thoughts in italics, which were OK, but later on in the book when she is (supposedly) an adult we get long passages of her inner voice and it's cringe-worthy at times, like reading a twelve year old's diary.

The plotting is also brazenly functional, all of the obstacles Maas creates for her characters are overcome without any sense of individual struggle or insight (adopting in india is difficult so I need to keep saying this

/ being dyslexic makes it hard to read but it probably means you are an artistic genius so look on the bright side, mopey / being a public figure can be hard so change your name and turn into a condescending bitch), you could gain a greater understanding of similar life stories from skimming a two page article in *Take a Break* magazine.

Jack is apparently a book reviewer, but the sole time we see him work on a review of a book "*he hated it; it was one of those experimental works where the author seemed more intent on showing off his brilliant and unexpected use of language and his lack of taboos than in telling a story*".

That was the most revealing line in the whole book. I ask you, a book reviewer who inherently dislikes a difficult read? How about a mountaineer who hates great heights, or a cook who hates exotic ingredients?

Maas has written one of those conventional works where she seems proud to prove that using prosaic and platitudinal language with a lack of creative imagination is the best way to tell a story. For a journalist maybe, but not for a novelist.

p.s. I feel like a heel for this review because Sharon once signaled that she liked one of my reviews on Goodreads, so I really wanted to like her book, which I only bought because of her generous contact. She has certainly been generally well reviewed by the readership here, so maybe I just chose the wrong one of her novels.

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### **Christel Lim says**

I read it quite a few years ago and I can't remember if it was that good or bad. So 3 stars.

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### **Samreen Mulla says**

the book is all about the journey of jyoti who lives on the streets on mumbai and the way her life changes when a foreign couple adopt her .its an amazing read .just grab the book and enjoy the journey

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### **Nicole Zimmer says**

This is one of my favorites! A beautiful story and so well written. Had a difficult time putting this book down. A street child from Bombay India is adopted by a Western Couple. It's a fascinating journey through India and you witness the many challenges involved in the adoption process and the raising of a third world child. The girl "Jyothi" has a difficult time adapting to her new life and it is only through music that she finds herself and becomes an international star.

Some interesting quotes:

#1.

" I don't remember too much about India...It was so long ago. I was a small child."

"But it's still there,' said Dean."If you dig deep enough you will find the memories."

"They're buried so deeply..."

"But experiences never really disappear" Dean said. "They're like stamps on the mind-like a photographic image. I bet if you try you'll find something.".....I was silent thinking....Memories, I discovered then, are

like a chest a grandmother has kept closed in the attic for years and years. It has gathered dust and cobwebs on the outside, and the lock is rusty with age and moisture, and it is completely forgotten; but then the grandchildren come and throw open the attic window and find the chest and sweep away the cobwebs and break open the lock and swing back the lid, and inside they find the past preserved in dazzling colours and tantalizing scents."

#2.

"There were statues that moved. Vaguely she remembered that these were people. Vaguely she remembered a time not like this, when there was some connection between her and them. The statues spoke too, but she did not understand them. Did not listen. Hearing is not listening. She could hear their voices but made no effort to listen. Had no interest.....Inside her was a solid block, A black block which never moved. She had seen them building a house once, had seen the workers mixing sand, cement and water which they poured into wooden moulds where it solidified: that was how it felt inside. As if they had poured the concrete into her and it had hardened, so that she was a statue filled with concrete, a statue that could move but not feel."

#3

"He longed for the little Bombay girl, the child who had danced in the streets, unable to contain her joy, the waif with the seraphic smile and the midnight eyes that had shone with delight."

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### **Daren says**

I expected to like this. The premise was appealing, the main character interesting, the Bombay slums fascinating. Some marginal spoilers sneak in below - fair warning?

It wasn't carried off, and for me, it was a let down.

The characters came across as shallow, most of them were annoying and it wasn't possible to sympathise with them at the relevant times in the story.

The sections of the story in India were enjoyable enough, and therefore the book started ok, but I couldn't bond with Jack and Monika as characters. I also felt the novel was very feminine in its approach - I don't really know how to explain it more than that, but I suspect the target audience is not me! It probably didn't help that the four of the five male characters were not particularly high in moral character.

Unfortunately there were also a lot of typos in this edition - around about 8 that jumped out at me, which I find really distracting in a novel.

Unfortunately doesn't make 3\*, only managing 2\*.

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### **Simran says**

Not your average rags-to-riches story!

The Speech of Angels captures the vivid sights, the cacophony of sounds and the pungent smells of the

darkest backstreets in Bombay, India, while taking you to the elite and elaborate dwellings in Germany and London in the same breath.

Her writing style excites the reader and draws them into a world, which may be different from their own, yet allows them to wholly relate to the story and empathize with the characters portrayed. It is a book that cannot easily be put down without devouring every page, right to the very last. The rich details and striking descriptions she utilizes paint an intense picture that becomes embedded in the reader's mind and is not soon forgotten.

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### **Juniper says**

It doesn't take much for me to fall in love with a book as long as it's more fantasy than non-fiction, and *The Speech of Angels* is most certainly a fantasy fiction. The theme of the story told in the summary promises to be a compelling story of a girl taken from poverty and given a blessed chance at life but I found the writing style to be choppy, and not the mysterious of fast-paced choppy but rather the, **WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS THE AUTHOR THINKING!**, type of writing.

My most blatant dislike of Sharon Maas's is not her hard followed writing style or the failed expectation that a girl taken off the streets and out of a hovel would have a strong character, (but hey, if you like that sort of thing!?), but rather the severely lacking emotional pay off.

I often find a strong emotional payoff, be it revenge or success against all odds can sooth the rage of a book ending. But the ending leaves enough room for improvement to fit the aircraft carrier *The USS Zumwalt* and no, and I mean NO, emotional pay off. To be honest, the only reason my copy of the book is not A) scattered in ashes, B) embedded in a wall, and/or C) embedded in a wall and the cause of burning the house down is because I simply could not get invested in this book.

Now, if you have stuck through my tirade, I first must apologize for writing a negative review because I know that that are many who would, could and have enjoyed *The Speech of Angels* but I simply but hope that reporting the aspects of this book that particularly dissuaded me from enjoying *The Speech of Angels* will let those could wouldn't enjoy this book know that there are plenty other books to enjoy.

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### **Judy says**

So far very enjoyable and an easy read. Want to keep turning the pages.

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### **Bachyboy says**

I really wanted to like this; had a lovely cover and was partly set in India. However I found it annoying at times and the characters just didn't really appeal to me. A German couple adopt a young Indian girl virtually off the roadside and she later becomes an accomplished violinist.

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