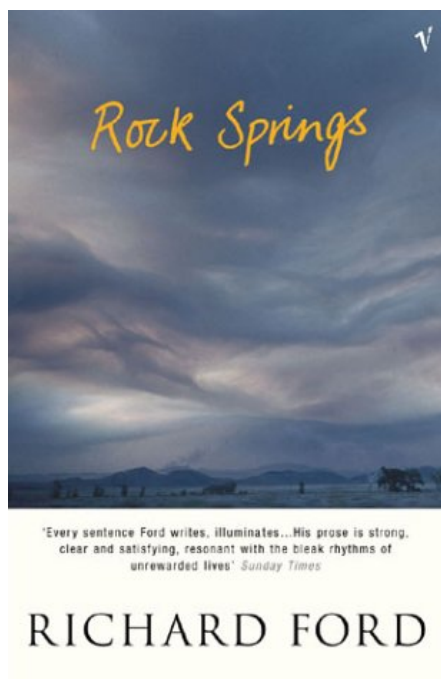




Rock Springs

Richard Ford

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Rock Springs

Richard Ford

Rock Springs Richard Ford

8 hours and 19 minutes

In these ten stories, Ford mines literary gold from the wind-scrubbed landscape of the American West--and from the guarded hopes and gnawing loneliness of the people who live there. **Rock Springs** is a masterpiece of taut narration, cleanly chiseled prose, and empathy so generous that it feels like a kind of grace.

"Beautifully imagined and crafted stories, by turns heartrending and wickedly funny; and just plain wicked. Richard Ford is a born storyteller with an inimitable lyric voice, and **Rock Springs** is the very poetry of realism."--Joyce Carol Oates

Rock Springs Details

Date : Published 2003 by Vintage (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9780099448976

Author : Richard Ford

Format : 245 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Literature

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From Reader Review Rock Springs for online ebook

Jamie says

Two words: gold mine. Two more: loved this.

My absolute favorite was "Sweethearts," followed close by "Communist" and the titular "Rock Springs."

Alice says

One of my dad's old books. I read it on a whim and I was surprised how I enjoyed a lot of the stories. I do love attention to detail and Ford is very meticulous about bringing the surroundings to life, creating a sense of realism in the book and among the characters that you don't find often.

Cardi says

too American, too male, too middle aged for me to really really get, but I'm sure there was something good going on here

plus, I learnt what the term 'gash-hound' means (had never heard that one before...)

Spencer says

The best and most succinct thing I can say about this collection is that almost all of these stories could be adapted by the Coen brothers. If that sounds like something you'd be into then I can almost guarantee you'll like Rock Springs.

Elsewise:

These stories can feel repetitive in the middle of the collection ("Sweethearts" and "Winterkill" have such identical set ups that if someone else had written one of them instead of Richard Ford, he could sue them for plagiarism. A woman in "Winterkill" says an almost identical line as a woman in "Empire"--certainly deliberate, also not going to help combat criticisms of sexism--and if you want to chuckle to yourself a little, you should read each story's opening paragraph in succession. There should be a Richard Ford opening paragraph writing contest on GoodReads). This collection could have been better if he instead worked the material into a few novellas. But the final three stories ("Optimists", "Fireworks", and "Communist") are the best, and ultimately won me over.

I also have to disagree with whichever critical blurb on my edition praised Ford's diversity of voice, or breadth of compassion, or suchlike. There was some stretching, but I would have been far more impressed with his writing ability and social imagination if, for example, "Sweethearts" had been seen through Troy's POV, or "Going to the Dogs" through Bonnie's and/or Phyllis's, etc.

????? says

the stories were full of surprise for me. I love realism in a way Ford described. Unfortunately, the book is not accessible and I can't download it from the internet. I'd be flattered if anyone send me ebook version of book. I'd be very flattered friends. I studied two stories of this collection. Sweethearts and Rock Springs. and I overwhelmed.

Glenn Sumi says

Hunting, fishing, drinking too much, avoiding going to jail, grudgingly going to jail, thinking up get rich schemes, abandoning them when they flop, committing or discovering adultery, witnessing accidents, witnessing murders, dealing with being unemployed when your wife's successful ex comes to town, being a child and knowing one day you'll be one of those sad adults, being an adult looking back on that life-changing incident that made you grow up, realizing you're basically alone.

Welcome to Richard Ford country, folks. Montana roads and interstates. Lots of motels. Pick-up trucks. Some gorgeous endings. All written in a low-key yet poetic voice that feels authentic and as comfortable as a faded pair of blue jeans. Imagine if Carver, Hemingway and Tobias Wolff drank too much beer and then got into a pissing competition.

John Kenny says

A number of years ago I tackled Richard Ford's novel *The Sportswriter* and found it heavy going, so I was reluctant to take on another of his works. However, I picked up this collection of his short fiction and decided to give him another chance. And, boy, am I glad I did. *Rock Springs* gathers a number of stories that generally take place in and around Great Falls, Montana, and feature characters either fallen on hard times or living a life of limited scope of opportunity.

In 'Rock Springs', a man travels in a stolen car with his girlfriend and daughter and their dog towards what they hope is their next chance at a life together. In 'Sweethearts', Russ and Arlene try to help prepare Arlene's ex-husband for a prison sentence he's handed down for bouncing cheques. In 'Children', George and his half-Blackfoot Indian friend, Claude, take custody for an afternoon of a young girl Claude's father has shacked up with for a night or two. They are charged with keeping her occupied for the day and take her fishing, along the way examining in their limited way the enclosed horizons of their lives.

These are stories that capture the essence of small town American life. The sense of place is astonishingly well realised. The characters share much in common; many are on their way nowhere fast. There is a strange ambivalence displayed by many of the main viewpoint characters when it comes to love and/or fidelity, a sense that there will not or cannot be any serious repercussions to living in the moment of a cadged physical intimacy.

Ford's women are perhaps more resilient than the men, fatalistic, accepting of the restricted circumstances of their lives, to an extent forgiving of their partner's weaknesses. I especially like Lois in 'Fireworks' with her unbounded optimism in the face of economic blight.

Highly recommended.

Nathan Wisnoski says

Ten variations on a handful of themes: broken families, financial insecurity, moral unease, desolation, and the West. The characters in these stories may appear interchangeable and a bit too similar, but to me they simply seemed human. While not every story has a protagonist to root for, most have one to root against, one to feel sorry for, and one with whom we can relate. The characters make mistakes, they pay for them, and they mostly accept their flaws. For me, these stories were not always enjoyable to read, but I couldn't help but want to read another. Seedy characters in desperate situations, and often with children caught in the middle of it all—I wanted to know more about these people, but Ford only gives us small glimpses at a time, mostly from the first person perspective. Each story is another fragment of small town life in the West: individually, some of these stories are weak, but as a collection, the recurring imagery, repeated phrases, and familiar locations complete the picture.

I'm already a huge Ford fan, but if his Bascombe novels turned you away, this short collection might hook you. As another reviewer noted, it's largely told from a male perspective, but I didn't feel as if the female characters were slighted at all. In fact, I felt these were some of his more realistic female characters, some caring, most emotionally detached, others overly sensual. While there's largely a disconnect between parents and children here, Ford still manages to convey a maternal tenderness in these stories that most female characters in the Bascome novels lacked.

I can see how the back-to-back publication of this and the Sportswriter in the late-80s really put Ford on the map.

Ron says

Richard Ford writes stories somewhat like Raymond Carver, only with more of an edge. Set mostly in the towns and rural areas of Montana, his stories are about characters who have survived against the odds - busted marriages, unemployment, jail terms, and a kind of bleak aimlessness. Some struggle to hold onto an identity that will maintain their self respect and some sense of security, but it's often slipping away as life's lessons leave them typically empty-handed.

In the title story, a man with a small daughter hopes to start a new life with a new girlfriend and a stolen Mercedes. In another story, a boy watches his parents' marriage come unglued as a young man only a few years older drives off into the night with the boy's mother. Two boys skip school to spend the day with a girl who has run away from home and has spent the previous night in a motel with the married father of one of them. A young man is escorted by his former wife and her new husband to the police, where he reluctantly turns himself in after robbing a convenience store. A game of canasta is interrupted in a young boy's home when his father punches another man in the chest and kills him. A man in a wheelchair goes fishing and discovers that his line is snared in the carcass of a deer. In another story, a biker has a vanity plate on his Harley with the word LOSER.

Children and teenagers figure in many of Ford's stories. They are witnesses to the disintegrating lives of the adults who try awkwardly and often unsuccessfully to care for them. All in their innocence or their growing awareness of the world seem destined to lives of loneliness and confusion like their parents. Who they are becomes no more than a thin boundary between bad luck and diminished dreams, muted by the temporary relief of alcohol, sex, and either a groundless optimism or a fatalistic surrender to futility.

This is an interesting book to read along with Mary Clearman Blue's "All But the Waltz," which describes the tough survivors among Montana homesteaders who were confronted by unimaginable bad luck during the 1920s and 1930s and found the resources within themselves to persevere. Only a generation or two later, Ford's characters seem made of lesser stuff, as though circumstances have reduced a pioneering spirit to exhaustion.

Ford is a terrific storyteller. These are wonderfully written stories that for the most part let characters speak for themselves as they puzzle over the meaning of what's happening to them. A sexual tension pervades many of the stories, along with a poignancy that allows characters to preserve a degree of dignity, even as they behave foolishly.

Matthew says

A lot of writers who do the brutal, spare stuff are not keen on explaining everything a character is thinking, even exactly what a character doesn't understand, or odd things the character might fear. Richard Ford doesn't avoid those tricky emotions here. Since these stories are all first-person, the narrator will always go into detail about what they believe are important moments. It becomes most intense when a character is confused:

Troy moved his hand around on the deer, then looked at me again in a painful way.

"What is it?" he said.

"A deer," I said. "You caught a dead deer."

Troy looked back at the little deer for a moment, and stared as if he did not know what to say about it. And sitting on the wet sand, in the foggy night, he all at once looked scary to me, as though it was him who had washed up there and was finished. "I don't see it," he said and sat there.

^That fragment might not be a good example. Moments that aren't so unusual become evil or darkly funny, like in Raymond Carver. It's the same territory. They were friends apparently. I've been reading some more of Carver's friends since I ran out of his writing to read: Tobias Wolff, Ford, and maybe Andre Dubus? I like this stuff, this book especially reminds me of 'Death in The Woods' by Sherwood Anderson.

Somehow I got a signed first edition of this off of amazon.com for 2 cents and 3.99 s&h.

Teresa Proença says

Este volume contém dez bonitas histórias, nas quais o narrador é sempre do sexo masculino variando as idades entre a infância, adolescência e idade adulta. Em todos os contos senti uma ternura imensa destes homens pela família: pela mulher, pelo pai e pela mãe - a qual, muitas vezes, abandona marido e filho para ir em busca de...sonhos?

Homens carentes e solitários que querem dar e receber amor.

Rock Springs

Earl...

a mulher abandonou-o e à filha. Ele junta-se com Edna, rouba um carro e vão procurar futuro numa terra onde há uma mina de ouro. Mas há pessoas para quem nada na vida é fácil...

Great Falls

Jackie...

um menino que nunca compreendeu a lógica dos acontecimentos que levaram à separação dos pais. Talvez pela *"incapacidade que não nos deixa compreender que a vida pode ser límpida e singela; que faz com que a nossa existência seja uma espécie de fronteira entre dois nadas; que faz de nós nem mais nem menos do que animais que se cruzam - desconfiados, rancorosos, desconhecendo a tolerância e a paixão."*

Namorados

Russel...

divorciado, vive com a filha e com a namorada Arlene, cujo ex-marido vai ser preso. Uma história sobre os sentimentos de amizade e de generosidade que continuam a existir entre um casal mesmo após a separação; e de ciúme e de amor e de medo da solidão. *"Eu sabia o que era o amor. Era não nos causarmos problemas um ao outro. Era não deixar uma mulher para ir atrás de outra. Era não me meter em sarilhos. E era nunca estar só. Isso nunca. Isso nunca."*

Crianças

George...

Claude e Lucy. Três adolescentes que numa tarde vivem um triângulo amoroso. *"Éramos amigos. No entanto, quando crescemos, aquilo que nos aconteceu enquanto jovens deixa de ter importância. Sei disso agora, embora o não soubesse na altura."*

Sem Cheta

Lloyd...

um homem sem cheta, sem sorte e sem mulher (que lhe fugiu com outro). Anima-se quando recebe a visita de duas corpulentas caçadoras, uma delas especialmente meiga. Mas quando um homem não tem sorte até o que parece bom é só *"uma amostra da pouca sorte que me esperava."*

Império

Sims...

um bom homem, casado com Marge. Para ele a morte mais horrível seria *"morrer de chatice"*. Durante uma viagem de comboio, enquanto a mulher dormia, tem uma aventura com uma passageira. *"Esta coisa pode dar cabo de ti, pensou ele, esta coisa de nada pode ser fatal."*

O Veado Morto

Lester...

e o amigo Troy, que anda numa cadeira de rodas, conhecem Nola num bar e vão os três fazer uma pescaria. Troy pesca um veado morto...

Optimistas

Frank...

tem 15 anos quando numa noite um acontecimento inesperado alterou toda a sua vida familiar.

Foguetes

Eddie...

está desempregado e o sustento da casa vem do trabalho da mulher Lois. Uma história de amor maravilhosa e com um final sublime.

O Comunista

Les...

tem dezasseis anos é órfão de pai e vive com a mãe, uma mulher que *"procurava alguém que nos protegesse a ambos, mas não deu resultado. Penso que o problema era ela ter tido de enfrentar a vida cedo de mais."*

Embora histórias diferentes de pessoas distintas (com mais defeitos que qualidades), têm em comum vidas quase sempre dominadas pela perda (ou risco de perder) os suportes afectivos necessários ao equilíbrio de um ser humano.

Todas me comoveram e fizeram sentir um grande carinho pelas personagens.

Glenn Russell says

Richard Ford with Raymond Carver

This collection of ten short stories published as part of the 1980s Vintage Contemporaries series is Richard Ford at his best. Certainly, Ford would go on to write a string of first-rate novels, but for my money these short stories are some of the finest American realist fiction I've come across. I had a blast doing a brief write—up of three of the ten below:

Rock Springs

Earl tells us first off how he's headed down from Montana to Florida where he could hook up with old friend who wouldn't turn him into the police. There's this issue Earl has with a number of bad checks which could mean serious prison time. Anyway, sitting in the front seat next to Earl is Edna, a woman he's been living with for the past eight months since she needed a man around to keep her crazy ex-husband Danny from breaking into her house to steal things, Danny being real needy since he took the kids. In the back seat is Earl's little girl Cheryl along with her little dog, Duke.

Halfway down through Wyoming, Earl is hit with a stroke of bad luck: the oil light starts flashing on the dash of the car he stole. We read, "I'd gotten us a good car, a cranberry Mercedes I'd stolen out of an ophthalmologist's lot in Whitefish, Montana. I stole it because I thought it would be comfortable over a long haul, because I thought it got good mileage, which it didn't, and because I'd never had a good car in my life, just old Chevy junkers and used trucks back from when I was a kid swamping citrus with Cubans."

Sidebar: Along with a few other American fiction writers from the 1970s and 1980s such as Larry Brown and Raymond Carver with their lower-middle-class characters, Richard Ford has been labeled a "dirty realist." This collection of stories, "Rock Springs" serves as a prime reason. Also, if the tenor of this story reminds you of the Coen brothers, films like *Fargo* or *The Big Lebowski*, there's a good reason: both Ford and the famous filmmakers feature down-and-out offbeat characters who frequently live outside the law as they deal with oddball happenings and events.

There's plenty more color as the story continues, including Edna recounting her tragic tale of what happened to a spider monkey she once brought home after winning the monkey in a game of dice and Earl stopping to make a call in the mobile home of a big Black woman caring for her brain damaged grandson, a home that's part of a mobile home community next to an honest-to-goodness gold mine. Oh, Earl, a gold mine – so close, yet so far away. I can assure you, this story is an honest-to-goodness Richard Ford gold nugget.

Going To the Dogs

"My wife had just gone out West with a groom from the local dog track, and I was waiting around the house for things to clear up, thinking about catching the train to Florida to change my luck. I already had my ticket in my wallet." So begins this story that is vintage oddball; matter of fact, as I was reading I was imagining how easily the unfolding events could be filmed by the Coen brothers. The narrator then goes on to tell how it is the day before Thanksgiving and hunting season with hunters and their old Chevys and pickups parked along the street below.

Our narrator, a man named Lloyd, hears a knock and opens his front door – standing on the frozen grass are two fat women, dressed like hunters, along with a dead deer. The two fat women want to give Gainsborough, the owner of the house, a deer steak. Lloyd tells them Gainsborough isn't here, he's in England. He invites the fat women in for some coffee and then the fun begins, including a lively sweet-sour discussion about tracking deer and a comic roll in bed with one of the fat women, Bonnie, who insists on calling him Curly instead of Lloyd. With its quirky dialogues and off-center descriptions, this story highlights how Richard Ford's writing displays a careful concern for subtlety, nuance and the rhythms of language. A superb example of the Writer's craft.

Communist

A moving tale told by our forty-one year old narrator, reflecting back on a vivid memory, a day when he was sixteen and taken on a hunting trip by a Vietnam vet turned communist, a man named Glen Baxter. At the time Glen was seeing his attractive thirty-two year old widowed mother, who also came along on the hunt, although she spent most of the time in the car they drove to wetlands where there were thousands of snow geese out on a lake.

Rich atmosphere in this Richard Ford story, as when we read: "I put down my gun and on my hands and knees crawled up the earthwork through the wheatgrass and thistle, until I could see down to the lake and see the geese. And they were there, like a white bandage laid on the water, wide and long and continuous, a white expanse of snow geese, seventy yards before me, on the bank, but stretching far onto the lake, which was large itself – a half-mile across, with thick tules on the far side and wide plums father and the blue mountain behind them." Not only the sights, smells and sounds but also the unfolding drama between narrator, mother and Glen Baxter prompts us as readers to appreciate how this day made such an enormous impact.

Simon A. Smith says

I don't know why it's taken me so long to read Richard Ford. He was influenced by one of my favorite writers (Richard Yates) and spent significant time hanging out with two of my other favorites (Tobias Wolff and Raymond Carver.) The time those three have spent together really shows. They all have very similar writing styles and often tackle the same heartbreaking subject matter. Ford may not be quite as good as Wolff or Carver, but who is? As far as short story writers go, nobody in my book.

Ford has this quiet and dark tone that also comes off as simple and deceptive. His characters are wrestling with hard life in the Northwest and feeling their way through rough patches in their lives. While many of the characters seem lonely and broken, Ford manages to always shine a light or toss a life jacket. There are some great lines about men weathering storms and coming out okay in the end... and other stuff about love gone sour, love gone crooked and life gone to the dogs. It's really strong stuff. The only minor complaint I have is that a lot of the stories seem to be about the same thing and sorta blend together, but I hardly doubt you'll mind the effect of continual gems coming at you one after another.

Perry says

Rocky Mountain Highs

Flock of Snow Geese

"Now he walks in quiet solitude, the forest and the streams, seeking grace in every step he takes.
His sight is turned inside himself, to try and understand
the serenity of a clear blue mountain lake."
Rocky Mountain High, Denver/Taylor, 1972

This splendid collection of short stories reminds me why I love realist short stories of unique characters in gorgeous faraway settings I'd never experience but for the magic of literature.

In picturesque prose precisely crafting signal situations, Richard Ford explores turbulence in relationships and the human restive consciousness, made all the more evident against his halcyon landscapes, from the wide ranges of Wyoming to the highlands of Montana. Each story one of resolution or revelation, eliciting an enduring empathy.

One story, called "The Communist," paints possibly the most brilliant scenery I've read in all literature. I cannot do it justice. Above is the closest picture I could find to a large *part* of the scene.

The best set of short stories I've read in a long time. Maybe ever.

Patrick McCoy says

I first read Richard Ford's great novels *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day* in the 90s close to when they were released. However, I hadn't read anything else until recently after reading an essay by Elizabeth Hardwick on the early writings of Ford and was inspired to rediscover him. Not long ago I read *The Ultimate Good Luck* and now his excellent short story collection, *Rock Springs*. I can see how Ford got thrown in with Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff as one of the originators of "dirty realism": these are stories of broken families, petty criminals, hard luck and hard times. Most of these stories take place in the barren and vast expanses of the Pacific Northwest in Washington State, Montana, and Wyoming. These are sparsely populated areas with harsh winters. It is also a time before general prosperity—there seem to be fewer options and harder living that reminds me of the hard luck people you saw in the 70s and 80s in dive bars, bus stations, and hitch hiking—hard living and desperate lives. Ford captures them all accurately with precision. The epiphanies are hard won in the pages of these deftly written stories.

Steven says

Every time I read this collection I enjoy it more than the last and become even more impressed with Ford's ability to get so deep without seeming to. His beginnings are subtle, and his endings crackle with meaning. The middle of his stories oscillate between quiet moments that explode like depth charges with their silence, and tense action threatening to undo the characters.

"Rock Springs" is remarkable for its tone, the way that Ford captured the language of the first-person narrator's sense of himself, but still let the reader see that the narrator was worse than he thought he was. The ending is brilliant, the way it winds up—rather than down—to a series of questions that are left hanging there for the reader.

"Great Falls" begins with this first paragraph: "This is not a happy story. I warn you." Are you hooked or what? There's so much in this story that is good: tone, details, precisely focused scenes, that climactic scene where the father has the gun under Woody's chin, the hopelessness of the scene with the mother, and the questions at the end, again without answers. This time a shadow of meaning follows the questions, but it is not an epiphany and it seems clear that this meaning is really in no way a result of the events the story recounts—it is something the narrator accumulated along the way, it's the something that allowed him to tell us this story.

"Sweethearts" is a story I admire for what it tries to do: put into words a situation that might defy expression. It's a story that might have been better if it had tried to do less, maybe give it the Carver treatment. It's like Ford was struggling hard to make the reader understand why this event is so significant, and thus he brings in all these details and dialogue to try to make us see the full import. Ultimately, though, I think those efforts work against him. There's too much going on. Better perhaps to have picked less to show and left more for

the reader to fill in.

“Children” is a complex story full of anger and tension and threats, yet it is the quiet moments that crush. When Lucy takes the beer and the hotdog and the transistor radio out of the paper bag and says: “I’ve accumulated this much so far.” Wow. And the best thing is that Ford doesn’t stop the flow of narrative, doesn’t let the narrator reflect, or even notice the importance of that image; he leaves it for the reader to discover. A little bit later Lucy says: “Batteries are my next assignment.” Yikes, it’s like being in a grain silo that’s slowly filling up. The way he plays the characters off each other in this story is fantastic. I like that George is observing and understanding so much, understanding things he isn’t aware of, while at the same time feeling that everything is a mystery, that he understands nothing. The ending is a nice touch. Claude has become quiet, so full of himself, yet clearly diminished. In this story, as with all of the stories in this collection, Ford has thought deeply about his characters, journeyed inside to imagine what life must mean, and feel like, for them. The things the characters worry about and question—or don’t—seem their own, they don’t appear to be disguised author’s questions (which of course they are).

“Going to the Dogs” seems the weakest, by far, in this collection. Nothing deep here, just an ironic twist as the guy going to stiff his landlord gets robbed, after being setup by the two women hunters. There is some humor in the situation, which is atypical for the stories in this collection.

“Empire” is a novella, or at least a very long story. It doesn’t culminate in any change for Vic, which is odd because I think the story gets its energy from the expectation that something is going to happen, something that will change Vic. But, even when he sees himself in the mirror, “An Adulterer’s face, a face to turn away from,” he doesn’t seem affected beyond the moment, and there is no sense that he will be affected. It’s a hard story to figure, with its juxtaposition of transitory feeling and loss. There’s a mood that permeates when we are just with Vic, and that mood is clashing with the mood of the framing scenes with Marge. I’m not exactly sure how Ford wants us to feel about these characters. The ending paragraph is stunningly nihilistic. “Winterkill” is a sleeper of a story. It starts out not moving anywhere fast and then ends in a crescendo. Like “Empire,” it has the juxtaposition of transitory feeling and loss as a driver for its meaning. And like many of Ford’s stories, a day in the life of the characters takes on much deeper meaning because of how the narrator thinks and feels about what happens. Without that perspective nothing in the story is dramatic, the drama comes from how the narrator reveals what’s at stake. The ending is one of Ford’s best: the narrator slipping away so as not to see, or be seen—he knows what’s at stake.

“Optimists” has the same structure as “Great Falls,” “Children,” “Communist,” and even “Jealousy” from *Women With Men* and the novel *Wildlife*: an early 40’s male narrator reflecting back on a teenage experience that he now realizes changed the course of his life. In all of these stories the narrator has so much authority. That authority comes partly from the accuracy of the details, and the mastery of tone, but it owes a lot to the matter-of-factness of the narration. Momentous events acknowledged. A history of hard times traceable, now, to those events. Yet, not a trace of self-pity. As the narrator of “Empire”—commenting on the army women, and imagining the lives they must have fled to choose a career of military life—says: “...something to run away from. Bad luck, really.” Or as the mother in “Optimists” says: “Maybe that’s what this is. Just a coincidence.” As for the story itself, the only scene that I had hard time with was the ending scene. The disconnection—the length of time since they’d last seen each other—between mother and son seemed too great based on the information Ford has provided in the story. There is a subtle hint that Frank may have blamed his mother for what happened to his father and their life; and she is at least concerned that Frank did not think that she was in love with the man his father killed. It’s a powerful ending scene, but strikes a slightly sour note on the believability scale. Although I’m not willing to say it would be a better story if we had more explanation for why they hadn’t seen each other.

“Fireworks” is a story I didn’t really appreciate until this reading. More life has passed me by so perhaps I can appreciate it now. Or maybe it was because I was having a similar day as the narrator when I read it! One of those days when your whole life and all its consequences seems to be in your head. One of those days when something otherwise inconsequential makes you aware of the choices you’ve made. One of those days where you look at where you’re at and realize it’s a place you never imagined yourself. Ford captures that state of mind perfectly in this story. Again, without self-pity—I think that is the key to what makes these narrators work (and perhaps what seems to fail in “The Womanizer” and “Occidentals” from *Women With Men*; those narrators wallow in self-pity.) The ending is pitch-perfect. Not a life changing moment, but a

rescuing moment just the same, the kind of moment we need more of in literature. Not to be saved forever—but saved for today, saved for right now, saved for just this instant.

If you forced me to choose—and this would be a tough choice—“Communist,” the collection’s concluding story, might just be my favorite. The geese are transcendent. Equally riveting is the way that the mother continues to taunt Glen about the wounded goose until he shoots it. And then that climactic moment when Les wants to hit Glen hard in the face and “...see him on the ground bleeding and crying and pleading for me to stop.” That’s a great honest moment. The ending scene with the mother is probably the best of the stories that end this way (“Great Falls” and “Optimists” are the others). Again, another honest moment. The transition Ford makes with the first sentence of the last paragraph so simply and so quickly brings back the frame—just in time to break your heart.

As I said, this is one of my favorite short story collections. These are stories that I can read over and over, and the more I do so, the more impressed I become with the subtlety of Ford's art in these stories. They have the appearance of being one thing, often because of the narrative voice he establishes. Many of the stories begin with an older narrator reflecting on something that happened in his youth. That sets up the expectation that the story is going to be about something the narrator learned, or has now come to understand about that long ago experience. That setup is usually fulfilled. But the reason the stories have so much power is that there is this sense that much more has happened than the narrator lets on or is even aware of himself. After years of repeated reading I'm beginning to see that the hidden power is in the other characters, sometimes the minor, bit players, and what happens to them, or how questions about what they might be feeling, haunt us. The narrator's experience is a kind of ruse. The narrator's story is satisfying—these might be good stories even if that's all that was there. But what makes these stories resonate is the subtle currents that are on the periphery of the narrator's experience. Things that happen to other characters—and that the narrator describes in passing, while missing their significance, but that Ford clearly intends the reader not to miss. How difficult a writing task is that?

R. says

I can't remember whether or not this collection was assigned for contemporary american lit, but the stories in *Rock Springs* just *seem* like the kind of trailerpark hardluck narrative that was all the rage back in the day. It's Raymond Carver, but with more hunting, more manslaughter, more wives (and ex-wives) working in taverns, more unemployment checks running out, more cheating husbands getting in bad with biker gangs, more cheating wives getting in a huff and flouncing down the road, and more escaping to Florida as *the* final chance to make good in a life gone wibbly-wobbly.

Don't get me wrong. The stories were good. They really speak of the dark-side of the trickle-down voodoconomics of the Reagan era. But they were all the same (samey), with aforementioned elements goofily distorted or bejeweled in one way or another from story to story. This book is best read a story at a time over days and days, preferably alongside something of more lyrical, literary, contemporary, stock.

Chantal says

Richard Ford has become my favorite author.

I have a new favorite author, Richard Ford.

It's important for you to know that I have a new favorite author, Richard Ford.

Three sentences saying very much the same thing, but yet each saying it so completely differently from the others. Yes, it's a matter of words, but more than that, it's a matter of tone. It's a matter of intimacy. And it is

the last sentence, the one that draws the recipient into the message -- because it implies, or rather creates, relationship -- that most seduces, most intrigues. It's a technique Richard Ford uses again and again in his collection of short stories, *Rock Springs*.

There are writers who cannot tell stories, and there are storytellers who will never write. And then there is Richard Ford, a masterful storyteller, and an excellent writer with a knack for writing in such a way that the reader feels she is being told a story. The small, simple, trick of involving the reader does great things to contribute to this.

Ford's story, "Great Falls", begins: "This is not a happy story. I warn you." And immediately the reader is curious, prepared and feeling familiar, if not quite involved. The story continues, introducing characters and setting:

My father was a man named Jack Russell, and when I was a young boy in my early teens, we lived with my mother in a house to the east of Great Falls, Montana, near the small town of Highwood and the Highwood Mountains and the Missouri River. It is a flat treeless benchland there...

And just as the reader starts to drift, the narrator interrupts the story, with a casual clarification more suited to conversation than literature, but so extremely effective here for the way it yanks the reader back. "He—my father—had been an Air Force sergeant and had taken his discharge in Great Falls."

A paragraph later, he does it again. "The house itself is gone now—I have been to the spot."

But then, as the story picks up, as the reader loses herself in the conflict, Ford is wise enough not to interrupt anymore, at least until the heavy drama comes to a pause when the narrator reminds us again of our familiarity, our relationship -- as storyteller and listener -- with a simple comment. "Things seldom end in one event."

And the story moves forward again, before finally wrapping up. Then, once the action stops the narrator returns to us with a long, thoughtful paragraph in which he contemplates the events of the story, questions them, and forms his own conclusions.

It's an effective strategy that works best in a first person narrative, and better still for the nature/content of Ford's stories which are wrought with the drama of everyday people and everyday life in the most basic of settings, small simple towns where everyone knows everyone and there's no such thing as formal.

"What I want to explain happened in November." "Communist"

"All that happened next is what you would expect to happen." "Optimists"

"I will say how all of this turned out because in a way it is surprising, and because it

did not turn out badly." "Children"

Andy Miller says

This is a collection of short stories published in 1987, well before his famous novels, *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day* and of course the recently published *Canada*. The thing that struck me the most while reading this collection was the striking similarities between the short story "Great Falls" and the first half of "Canada" written more than 25 years later. While there were differences in plot, the characters and back stories have so much in common I wondered if Ford had always meant to write *Canada* with that set of characters and locale but had to settle for the short story early in his career or if there was autobiographical inspiration for both the story and novel, albeit 25 years apart

All the stories are set in Montana and while I've read other reviewers describe them as about working class characters, many characters do not work, but exist on the fringes of society. These are well written stories that make you care about the characters even when they are not sympathetic. My main complaint with this collection is the too common thread of the relationships between the men and women in the book, the thread of flawed but good man involved with a "trashy" or "expendable" woman got tired after reading so many back to back

But on the whole, a great collection worth the read

Justin says

Richard Ford's short stories, because they are short stories, lack the almost overwhelming power and depth of his great novels, *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*. But as short stories, they are no less masterfully crafted and lyrical. Of the huge glut of American writers and their publications, Ford is one of the few who will actually be studied and remembered after he is long dead and gone. He has such a distinct rhythm to his prose, somehow lyrical without being flowery. He excels at adding an almost mythical quality to utterly realistic, frequently even mundane moments in the lives of distinctly American characters (working class types, mostly; ex-military drifters, semi-employed day laborers, teens in small towns). His best passages depict people dancing in a bar. Friends fishing at the river, or even a character just driving, watching the world blow by. His stories certainly have elements of violence and surprise, but as *Rock Springs* travels through its dozen or so stories, these elements become less and less, and the tales become, oddly, even more powerful and memorable as a result. Ford also ends his stories as well as any writer alive, frequently zooming back from the protagonist and showing us how they and this small moment they have been captured in resonate in the great, hard void of a universe that surrounds us all. I'll finish with an example of what I'm talking about, the final paragraph of the wonderful story "Fireworks":

"Starling couldn't see. Lois opened the door out into the drizzle, turned her back to him and struck a match. He could see it brighten. And then there was a sparkling and hissing, and then a brighter one, and Starling smelled the harsh burning and the smell of rain together. Then Lois closed the door and danced out before the car into the rain with the sparklers, waving her arms round in the air, smiling widely and making swirls and patterns and star-falls for him that were brilliant and illuminated the night and the bright rain and the little dark house behind her and, for a moment, caught the world and stopped it, as though something sudden and perfect had come to earth in a furious glowing for him and for him alone - Eddie Starling - and only he could watch and listen. And only he would be there, waiting, when the light was finally gone."
