



## A Permanent Member of the Family

*Russell Banks*

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## **A Permanent Member of the Family** Russell Banks

A masterly collection of new stories from Russell Banks, acclaimed author of *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Rule of the Bone*, which maps the complex terrain of the modern American family

The New York Times lauds Russell Banks as "the most compassionate fiction writer working today" and hails him as a novelist who delivers "wrenching, panoramic visions of American moral life." Long celebrated for his unflinching, empathetic works that explore the unspoken but hard realities of contemporary culture, Banks now turns his keen intelligence and emotional acuity on perhaps his most complex subject yet: the shape of family in its many forms.

Suffused with Banks's trademark lyricism and reckless humor, the twelve stories in *A Permanent Member of the Family* examine the myriad ways we try—and sometimes fail—to connect with one another, as we seek a home in the world. In the title story, a father looks back on the legend of the cherished family dog whose divided loyalties mirrored the fragmenting of his marriage. In "Christmas Party," a young man entertains dark thoughts as he watches his newly remarried ex-wife leading the life he once imagined they would share. "A Former Marine" asks, to chilling effect, if one can ever stop being a parent. And in the haunting, evocative "Veronica," a mysterious woman searching for her missing daughter may not be who she claims she is.

Moving between the stark beauty of winter in upstate New York and the seductive heat of Florida, *A Permanent Member of the Family* charts with subtlety and precision the ebb and flow of both the families we make for ourselves and the ones we're born into, as it asks how we know the ones we love and, in turn, ourselves. One of our most acute and penetrating authors, Banks's virtuosic writing animates stories that are profoundly humane, deeply—and darkly—funny, and absolutely unforgettable.

Russell Banks is one of America's most prestigious fiction writers, a past president of the International Parliament of Writers, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His work has been translated into twenty languages and has received numerous prizes and awards, including the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. He lives in upstate New York and Miami, Florida.

## **A Permanent Member of the Family Details**

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Author : Russell Banks

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## **From Reader Review A Permanent Member of the Family for online ebook**

### **Erika Schoeps says**

I received this book courtesy of Goodreads First Reads.

I adored this book of simple, elegant vignettes. The writing is simplistic, but never fails to tell the reader what needs to be said. The simple writing worked with these stories because it left so much up for audience interpretation.

Every story begins by throwing the reader headfirst into the character's life directly before an important life event. Things may seem bland and normal at first, but the story moves from a slow simmer of tension into the climax. Often, I was physically uncomfortable as a seemingly normal scene slowly and skillfully progressed into a release of pent up emotions. Just as the reader begins to feel as if they are grasping the situation, the author abruptly throws you out and ends the story. I lingered for a few minutes to think about what had just occurred after every story.

Something else I really loved about this short story collection was that it was loosely connected through themes of family and pent-up desire. You can easily move from story to story because of the feeling of cohesion between them.

Pick this book up. I'm excited to check out more of Banks' work.

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### **Philippe Malzieu says**

The art of the short novel is difficult. It is necessary to concentrate a novel in few pages. The fall must be perfect. The reference remains Maupassant. Russel banks gives us 12 splendids one. However his characters are ordinary. Their lives are fragile : divorces, misery, disease...

And then this moment ago or all wavers, or they are face to their life, face to theirsself. No pathos, just life in all its nuances. The bitterness of the first beer mouthful for a divorced man who attends the marriage of his ex-wife, arms of Jane betraying his refusal to leave her husband for Isabel...

Russel Banks, a virtuoso. Brilliant.

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### **Adrienne Mathiowetz says**

Russell Banks hasn't quite figured out how to talk like anyone besides Russell Banks; there is one story in this collection from the point of view of an older black woman, and it almost felt like literary blackface; reading it in public made me want to issue an apology to everyone around me while crawling under a rug. Most of his stories are from the point of view of older white men, or older white women who sound a lot like the older white men, and hey if that's what you know writing what you know isn't a crime but I will say this: even that story, the one that was so clearly written by someone he was not, had the somehow classic and yet

entirely unpredictable Russell Banks twist - the serrated knife heart-stab at the end that audibly makes you go "ughghhh."

You need to sit with these stories a while before you can move on to the next one. It's a struggle to stop thinking about it. And if that's not a litmus test for an amazing short story, I don't know what is.

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### **LindaJ^ says**

I won this advance reading copy in a first reads giveaway. I was torn between 3 or 4 stars for this book, but decided on 4 because there were more stories that I liked than those I did not and all were well-written.

There are 12 stories in this collection. Some are much longer than others. The ones I liked best deal with situations that any of us might find ourselves to one degree or another. For example, in *The Outer Banks*, a married couple in their 70s, without children, sold their home and all their possessions and bought an RV so they could spend their remaining years of traveling to all the places they had wanted to go. The story opens just after they have discovered their dog dead in the shower. The dog, like them, was fairly old when the journey began. Her death seems to carry a message ... . In *Big Dog*, Erik, an artist, has won a major award. He tells his longtime partner and his good friends but no one seems to react as he expects.

These stories make you think about what you might do if faced with a similar situation. They ring true.

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### **Kasa Cotugno says**

Unlike most short story collections, this one shines from first to last. Often I've found the earlier in the book, the stronger the story, weakening as they progress. But each of these is a gem in and of itself, and are just the right length. Some could have been expanded into full length novels, but Banks is a fine craftsman who knows when enough is enough.

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### **Diane S ? says**

Banks is an author I really need to read more of, because in this book of short stories I enjoyed the way he wrote, the way he put together his stories without always having a definitive end yet providing enough information that the reader is able to come to their own conclusion.

These stories are about the people and things that one loses as one goes through life. Sometimes it is not their own fault but they need to find a way forward, regardless. Some readers have found these stories depressing but I found them realistic. Things happen, it is just a fact of life.

The first story in this book, *Former Marine*, is a story I will not forget and it set the tone for the stories that followed. Also liked *Snow Birds*, but in truth all of them were immensely readable and I did not actively dislike any. One of my favorite books of short stories that I have read this year, I think this is a collection I will long remember.

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## **Uwe Hook says**

Each of these great short stories describes the deterioration, loss, or the end of a relationship. In doing so, we learn about the gossamer threads that maintain the fabric of relationships - a dog in one story. Sons don't really know the father who they see often. Sudden fame disrupts whatever kept one couple together and in others it is slow motion destruction. I found one story particularly haunting. A man's life is saved because of a transplant. The surviving partner of the donor wants to meet him. The encounter is made possible by the sudden loss of a relationship and the new relationship is random and held together only by a series of improbable events. What a memorable story, told in 10 pages.

Banks creates memorable characters so quickly and with such great skill that you finish each short story with much the same sense of familiarity as one has after reading a novel. I have not enjoyed an anthology this much since J.D. Salinger's nine short stories.

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## **Kerfe says**

These ordinary lives are fraught with danger and uncertainty. Life is both too much and not enough. Any action or incident or word--performed or aborted, begun or forgotten, said or left dangling, large or trivial--anything and everything can start the dominos falling down.

Parallels and divergences, connections and losses, all are chillingly recognizable.

The language is not fancy, but the details are etched in mind's eye and echo in memories that linger in a very familiar way.

"He knows how she feels. Sort of. She feels hopeless. And invisible. But not to him: Billy sees her, and if he can see her--if one other person can know that she's alive and in spite of everything still kicking--then she needn't feel hopeless, right? Same for him, if one other person can see him."

So tell your stories, not just to yourself, but to another. Let your shopping list fall into someone else's hands so they can imagine your life. Think out loud to the world, watch, witness.

and when all else fails,  
tell and live  
the truth.

(I won this book on goodreads)

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## **Miriam Bridenne says**

Russell Banks' talents are so numerous that it would be burdensome to list them. There is one skill, though, that sets him apart from most of his fellow writers: his ability to create characters who move you to tears. A Permanent Member of The Family makes you feel as if you were reading stories about your next door

neighbors, your dearest friends or close family members. The way Banks dissects their lives, their failures, together with their vulnerabilities simply annihilate any distance you could try to keep in order to protect yourself from the disasters of their existences.

This has to do with the precision of his language – a precision that never fails to seize the mundane details of his characters' lives —, with the way he paints social and financial systems that inevitably crush his heroes, as well as with his capacity to unveil sometime the cruelty, sometime the infinite tenderness, that motivate their behavior.

“He was thinking of his divorce from Janice seven years ago, the end of a brief but perfect marriage – a marriage ruined by the affairs and dalliances that had resulted from his refusal to come in off the road and live and work close to home, maybe run a bookstore, turn himself into a domesticated man, a faithful husband because watched, a secure husband because watchful. But he'd spent 20 years on the road before falling in love with Janice, and after marrying her continued sleeping five nights a week away from home. Howard believed that he had married too late, when he was too old to change his way. He was attractive to women, in spite of being a cold and selfish man, and he had betrayed Janice frequently, and finally, Janice had betrayed him back and had fallen in love with one of her lovers, and now, she was married to him and had two children with him, and that was that.

When a terrible thing happens and it's your damn own fault, there is no closure, he thought. Whatever happened, you live with it.”

Banks' narratives are perfectly shaped, paced and balanced so much so that they seem to be written effortlessly. Most of them end on a statement of the characters' powerlessness. As we close the collection, a dark yet humorous note calls to mind the final sentence of Yates's *Easter Parade*: “And do you know a funny thing? I'm almost fifty years old and I've never understood anything in my whole life”.

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### **Jay Fisk says**

I understand why critics praise Russell Banks. His voice is uniquely masculine and American. But is there ever even the slightest possibility of joy in any of his works? Children and dogs die, people get bitten (and perhaps eaten) and every man in the book is on the cusp of despair if not actually wallowing in it. He has a clear view of the America he wants to represent, but forcing our heads to share the view in story after story becomes, well, a little forced.

While I appreciate his skills, I found myself picking up the book with dread. If hope is the thing with feathers, this book is the carcass that remains.

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### **Jill says**

Russell Banks' short stories don't rely on fireworks and bells and whistles; there's no hint of post-modernism or genre bending in them. They're deceptively simple and straightforward...even dispassionate in tone. Yet in many ways, they are morally complex; certainly, they pack a wallop.

Most of them focus on men of a certain age – time-tested, time-broken men who have struggled through broken dreams and damaged relationships.

In the eponymous story – the story of a post-divorce family – the aging dog is the last tenuous link to the two families. “None of us knew that she was helping us postpone our anger and need for blame – blame for the separation and divorce, or the destruction of the family unit, for our lost innocence.”

In Christmas Party, a cuckolded husband attends the holiday party of his ex-wife and her new husband and discovers that their veneer of amiability is strained during the time of good cheer. The story Snowbirds begins with the death of Isabel’s spouse George; her good friend Jane flies down to Florida to comfort her. Yet Isabel is in scant need of comforting and the focus shifts to Jane herself. “It made Jane believe for a moment that she could be fearless, as fearless as Isabel, that she could be reborn as someone else, as someone unformed, and that, like Isabel, she could become an adolescent girl again.”

Lost and Found is a beautifully-crafted story about a middle aged man, lonely in his marriage, who teetered on the brink of infidelity and “didn’t want to remember what I lost that night. And what I found.” The satiric story Blue – set in a used-car lot – is different type of story with shades of Stephen King. And the final story, Green Door, is a more complex tale about postponing desires, cultivating fantasies, and ultimately realizing that what we want isn’t necessarily what we get.

A Permanent Member of the Family is proof positive that short stories can shine through sharp insights, provocative themes, and a laser focus on alienated individuals yearning for understanding and connection. It’s another triumph for Russell Banks. 4.5.

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### **Steve Petherbridge says**

I'd never read any of Russell Banks, until picking up this book after a high personal bookshop employee recommendation and a review in the Irish Times. This is a great book and he belongs with the very best masters of the short story genre. He doesn't have the same publicly acclaimed reputation in Europe, but, is up there with Ford and Carver. He seems to be a writer's writer. These are 12 stories drawn from the panorama of modern American life, mostly revolving around the complexity and diversity of family life and mid-life and all their challenges, both successful and not. Add in the tales of the twilight of old age and bereavement and most of the humanity of modern American life is here. Some of the ending's are very skilfully constructed with nice twists to leave the reader thinking: well, I didn't expect that! As my hero, Elmore Leonard says in the cover blurb: "if you've never read Banks it's time you acquired the habit." That was good enough for this reader and Banks is a habit that I intend enjoy forming. I read it in a day and a half and was sorry when it ended.

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### **Francis Carrière says**

Je ne m'attendais à rien et je fus vraiment surpris par les très bonnes nouvelles de Banks. Son talent d'écrivain est évident. Je tâcherai de lire autre chose de lui.

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## Will Byrnes says

Given the unsettled nature of the families in Russell Banks' dozen stories, the title of his sixth short story collection, *A Permanent Member of the Family*, might have a bit of an ironic aroma to it. Marriage is, if anything, *impermanent* here. The title character in *Former Marine* had to raise his boys alone after their mother took off. Philandering, while not depicted, is noted as causative in the demise of several other relationships in the collection. And even when a marriage has not dissolved, it is often shown to be or to have been threadbare. There are a few stories where things marital are not seen, *Blue*, *The Invisible Parrot*, but the tendency is to the sorry state of home and hearth. It is not surprising that marriage has such a central place in the author's work. His current marriage is his fourth.

all of us were fissioned atoms spun off nuclear families, seeking new, recombinant nuclei

Lines are drawn, and crossed. They separate before from after, denial from acceptance, uncertainty from realization. In *Christmas Party*, for example, a man is invited to the home of his ex and her husband for a party, and his underlying humiliation and rage must find an outlet before he can cross over from before to after. A singular event in the title story defines the place where the stretching of connections snaps.

### **The Author-** from Wikimedia

The characters here often face moral choices, a favorite concern of Banks. Faced with financial stress in his old age, a *Former Marine* must make difficult decisions in order to be able to continue providing for his children, and later, in order to protect them. In *Lost and Found*, a businessman at a convention is confronted with the time when he brought a woman who was not his wife to his hotel room, and the decision he faced then. In *Searching for Veronica*, a woman confronts the guilt she felt for turning out of her home someone who was at great risk in the larger world. The choices are never black and white.

Banks sets his stories largely in the upstate New York town of Keene, his current residence, near Lake Placid, and Florida, his other current residence, so his descriptions of place ring with authenticity. He has a background as a politically concerned sort (he tried joining Castro's revolution, despite not knowing how to speak Spanish, but got no farther than Florida) and his appreciation for the struggles faced by working people is never far. He had a working class upbringing himself.

I think I inevitably end up feeling a special kind of sympathy for people whose lives are shaped and controlled and manipulated by people with more power than them. – *from Harpers article*

It is also pretty clear that he holds a less than fond opinion of the media, whether the whores are the media professionals or those who would use them to personal ends, as shown in *Blue*.

Banks has achieved a status as one of the top writers of his generation, with a dozen novels to his credit, including *Continental Drift*, *Affliction*, *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Lost Memory of Skin*. *A Permanent Member of the Family* is his sixth collection of short stories. I found these tales to be extremely well told. There are ironic twists, as every writer of short stories must have at least a bit of O Henry DNA floating about. (Banks won an O Henry award for his short story collection *Searching for Survivors*. A few did not grab me, seeming somewhat obscure commentary on writing per se, but most presented relatable characters confronting real-world choices, or repercussions. Banks has a gift for detail, without cluttering the place up with too much. His style is straight ahead story-telling with less of the lyrical description some other writers employ.

The work of a seasoned pro, *A Permanent Member of the Family* merits at least a temporary place with yours.

=====THE STORIES

*Former Marine*

Faced with the loss of his business and a need to support himself and help out his three sons, who far too conveniently are all in police work, a man takes to a life of crime.

*A Permanent Member of the Family*

A family pet does not go along with a splitting couple's custody arrangements. An event regarding the pet defines where one family situation ends and another begins

*Christmas Party*

A man is invited to the Christmas party thrown by his ex and her husband, who are living the life he had hoped for. What to do with the rage? How to move on?

*Transplant*

A recent heart transplant recipient is approached by the widow of the man whose heart he received, wanting to hear it beat one last time. The heart may replace the one that stopped working, but cannot truly replace the one that was broken.

*Snowbirds*

While snowbirding in Florida, a woman's husband dies. Instead of grief, she appears to feel liberated. And when a friend offers to come help her with arrangements she finds something more.

*Big Dog*

Seems like it would be a cause for celebration when a sculptor is awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, but his wife and friends seem more resentful than anything else.

*Blue*

After saving for years to be able to buy a car of her own, a black woman in Florida finds herself accidentally trapped in a used car lot after hours, beset by a watchful pit bull.

*The Invisible Parrot*

A young man in a local store tries to imagine the experience of others there, but imagination is not quite enough. Is this the writer wondering about the ability of writers to imagine the experience of others?

*The Outer Banks*

A retired couple's dog has passed away while they are RV'ing about the country. They stop at a beach in North Carolina to bury it.

*Lost and Found*

A man meets a woman he had almost slept with at a conference years before. When he comes across her again he looks back on that decision.

*Searching for Veronica*

A woman is fearful that a person she tossed out of her house some years back has come to a bad end.

*The Green Door*

A questionable character in a bar is looking for a place where he can get unusual entertainment. The bartender directs him, but faces another decision about helping or not helping the man later.

Review posted - 12/29/13

This review is cross-posted on Cootsreviews.com

=====EXTRA STUFF

From December 12, 2012 Harpers – A Conversation with Russell Banks – by Jesse Barron

A wide-ranging interview in the Paris Review

A critical review of his work up to 2001

Banks reads his story “The Moor” on This American Life in 2000 – 19 minutes long, from the 40 minute mark in the program

A New York Times interview with Banks - 1/2/04 - Russell Banks - By the Book

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**Stefani says**

The characters in Russell Banks' stories are suffering with quiet desperation, their needs and desires capitulated to circumstances beyond their control (divorce, abandonment) or the tacit resignation of middle age where certain realities are no longer escapable. His stories are vignettes of small-town life where the complicated realities of people's lives are masked by the simplicity of their surroundings, making their actions all the more surprising—in "Christmas Party," a man's ex-wife adopts an Ethiopian infant in a small, Upstate NY town; in "Former Marine," a destitute man finds creative ways to get money that belie his strict adherence to military principles. The subject matter isn't pretty or cheerful, but, than again, neither is real life. I appreciate authors who can write about dog and human deaths in a way that doesn't compel me to blow my brains out.

Though the blurb on the book jacket describes this book as being about family relationships and how we see ourselves in the context of others and some other vague nonsense, I don't think that's what it's about at all. It's a catalog of the shortcomings and compromises made in the context of relationships and how these decisions may alter the course of our lives. In "Lost and Found," a man struggles with the decision he made not to have an affair, though he is unhappily married. In "Blue," a woman sacrifices her whole life for others, until finally she has enough money to purchase a car, but she's put in a dangerous situation before she can make a decision.

Some of the realities laid bare in these stories are depressing, sad, even heartbreaking, more so, perhaps, because the characters are at a point in their lives when things are unlikely to change. At times it was almost too painful to contemplate. But, like most good writing, it forces the reader to reevaluate what they think they know about life.

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## Nick says

Many years ago, I read Russell Banks' "Trailer Park" and it redefined for me what a short story collection could and should be. Instead of a collection of whatever the writer had published in literary magazines in the previous few years, it was a careful observation of a set of well-realized characters in a particular place and time, how their lives intersected, how they affected each other or failed to. It was a story of a community, a place where people found themselves together, and it clarified for me what moved me about some of the literature I like best, like Dylan Thomas' "Under Milkwood" or Juan Rulfo's "Pedro Paramo". (At the time I read "Trailer Park" that phrase had not yet become dismissive shorthand for a certain socioeconomic class that the speaker feels the need to stereotype and insult, or at least I was not aware of its usage as such). So, in "A Permanent Member of the Family", Russell Banks is, through no fault of his own, up against some stiff competition from an earlier self. The characters in these stories, even those with families, are all solitary. It is a different, in some ways quite typically American, way of viewing things, and of course there are plenty of novels and stories that take that perspective and make something powerful of it. But this collection lacks the moving observational power that Banks brought to "Trailer Park" (or that I remember him bringing to it; perhaps it's not there at all or perhaps I'm wrong about this book). The characters and their situations seem in some places tired--the destitute veteran in the heartland, the merry widow escaping the Midwest for Florida, the divorced man at loose ends, the divorced parent grappling with custody, the recipient of a transplant who meets a woman who loved the donor. There are nods to some of the tropes that have become fashionable, eruptions of violence, unreliable narrators, nods toward fantasy. In the middle sits a particularly hollow story about how the receipt of a McArthur grant costs a sculptor his jealous friends. Skill, perceptiveness, a language that is expressive without being showy--Banks has it all. But all too often in this collection I found myself missing the sharp delineation of the humanity that I know Banks can place at the center of a story.

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## Matt Braymiller says

I enjoyed parts of this collection of stories. I think what I most enjoyed was the local flavor to the first half or so of the tales. They are set in the eastern Adirondack region of New York and the surrounding environs. It was fun hearing stories that take place in places with which I am familiar.

However, the stories themselves are pretty somber and don't have a lot of feel-good moments in them. The eponymous story, for example doesn't have much going for it in the happy department. Despite the depressing nature of the subjects, they feel real, and I found myself thinking, "Yes, that could happen," more often than not. Even the story set in the used car lot in Florida had that cynical reality feeling to it.

Problem is, I like to read stories that help me escape the cynical realities of our world, and these did not do that. They did, however, make me grateful that I am not a character in a Russell Banks story.

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## Benoit Galarneau says

Mea culpa : je n'avais encore rien lu de Russell Banks. Je me lancerai sans doute dans une autre oeuvre cet été.

Si vous avez des idées suicidaires, ce livre vous fera passer à l'acte. Noir, noire, noir. Et déprimant. Douze nouvelles, douze tranches de vie américaines déprimantes. De l'ex-marines voleur et à cette Noire éviscérée par un pitbull ou ce fondamentaliste chrétien à la recherche de satisfactions perverses, jamais l'humanité n'aura paru atteindre avec autant de puissance le fond du baril des âmes perdues. Troublant de vérité.

Pourtant, l'écriture est si fine et complexe. Au travers les nouvelles, l'auteur passe du présent au passé, de la première personne à la troisième mais toujours avec ce désengagement intime envers les personnages.

Trois étoiles plutôt que quatre car les nouvelles ne sont pas toutes de la même qualité.

Oui, je relirai Russell Banks.

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## Julie Christine says

The cover of *A Permanent Member of the Family* shows a single robin's egg in a nest. It is an image that suggests beauty, hope, renewal, rebirth. Yet this sight of a single egg, alone and defenseless, is also a bit jarring.

*A Permanent Member of the Family* shows the impermanence of what we cling to most tightly: our families, marriages, jobs, and dreams. I'll warn you now. You'll be more than a bit jarred when you come to the end of this short story collection. You will be shaken.

The three stories which open this twelve story collection, *Former Marine*, *A Permanent Member of the Family*, and *Christmas Party* are familiar Banks territory: the failure of the modern American man. In two of the stories, the central character resorts to or imagines violence as a means to transcend his pain. In the collection's eponymous story, a father unwittingly inflicts pain on the most innocent and beloved member of the family. I knew what was coming and my heart broke even as I was reading, but I couldn't stop. Damn you, Banks.

The heart plays a literal role in *Transplant*, a tender story, perhaps sentimental and manipulative. But it is an excellent example of the power of short form fiction. In twelve pages we experience the full ranges of emotions for one man, and in the briefest of scenes another character enters and turns our world upside-down.

*Snowbirds*, about a widow riding a wave of giddiness after the sudden death of her husband, is funny-sad and startlingly real. Satire works when it pokes at the tiny cavity we're pretending not to feel--the decay of our moral selves.

*Big Dog*, which takes a man to an intimate dinner with friends after he learns he has just been awarded the MacArthur, or "genius" Grant hit hollow notes for me. I neither connected with nor felt overly concerned about these characters. *The Invisible Parrot* and *The Green Door*, well, I'm not really certain what they were meant to do as stories. They left me a little squirmy with disgust and sadness and feeling like I needed a shower. But dang if Banks's writing didn't compel me to read on.

Russell Banks loves dogs. I do, too. The beloved family pet makes notable appearances in *A Permanent Member of the Family* and *The Outer Banks*. But *Blue*, the collection's nod to Carl Hiassen satire and

Stephen King horror, upends our adoration for our canine companion. Beware of used car lots, is all I will say about that.

*Lost and Found* and *Searching for Veronica* are the collection's most haunting. Banks strips away the lies we tell ourselves and others as we trudge through our lives and lays bare our darkest sides.

I rarely do well with dark, bleak, and hopeless narratives. I read to be taken away from the world, not mired in its tragedies. But rarely do I encounter writing that holds me firmly by the chin and forces me to look, until I no longer resist. Russell Banks, like Raymond Carver before him, and his contemporaries Colm Toibín and Tim Winton, are among the authors I most admire who write family tragedy with empathy and realism. Their writing flows like cold mountain stream; I am cleansed by the catharsis of their words.

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### **Tim says**

Depressing. He's a talented writer, but way, way, way too depressing (the dreary suburban settings, the lives plagued with loss, the moribund futures of his characters). The quality of the prose shines through, but just way too mournful for me (and I say that as a reflection on me more than a judgment upon the author; if you' like literary fiction on the dark side, you will like this book).

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