



The Flood Girls

By Richard Fifiield

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February 2016 Indie Next List Pick

This snappy, sassy redemption story set in small-town Montana is “a wild and crazy debut novel by a talented young writer” (Jackie Collins), filled with an uproarious and unforgettable cast of characters you won’t want to leave behind.

“[*The Flood Girls*] includes barfights and AA meetings, a parade, a wedding, and a black bear, all of which Fifiield juggles beautifully...*The Wild West* earns its name all over again in this lovable chronicle of small-town insanity.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

Welcome to Quinn, Montana, population: 956. A town where nearly all of the volunteer firemen are named Jim, where *The Dirty Shame*—the only bar in town—refuses to serve mixed drinks (too much work), where the locals hate the newcomers (then again, they hate the locals, too), and where the town softball team has never even come close to having a winning season. Until now.

Rachel Flood has snuck back into town after leaving behind a trail of chaos nine years prior. She’s here to make amends, but nobody wants to hear it, especially her mother, Laverna. But with the help of a local boy named Jake and a little soul-searching, she just might make things right.

In the spirit of *Empire Falls* and *A League of Their Own*, with the caustic wit of *Where’d You Go, Bernadette* thrown in for good measure, Richard Fifiield’s hilarious and heartwarming debut will have you laughing through tears.

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The Flood Girls By Richard Fifiield Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #368954 in Books
- Brand: Gallery Books
- Published on: 2016-02-02
- Released on: 2016-02-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 336 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"From the first page of *The Flood Girls*, I knew Richard Fifield was an extraordinary force of nature and his debut novel a masterful tour-de-force. This novel is like Richard Russo + E. Annie Proulx + Truman Capote, if Capote were alive today and narrating a reality show about small-town Montana on Bravo. You will be awed." (Jenna Blum, New York Times bestselling author of *Those Who Save Us*)

"[*The Flood Girls*] includes barfights and AA meetings, a parade, a wedding, and a black bear, all of which Fifield juggles beautifully...The Wild West earns its name all over again in this lovable chronicle of small-town insanity." (*Kirkus Review*, *Starred Review*)

"THE FLOOD GIRLS is a wild and crazy debut novel by a talented young writer. Edgy and original, it's worth the trip." (Jackie Collins, New York Times bestselling author)

"Reading this novel is like unwrapping the wackiest birthday gift you've ever received: *The Flood Girls* is a heart-shaped box filled with broads, softballs, drunks, Jackie Collins' paperbacks, music, guns, and, most vibrantly of all, humanity. I started this book laughing out loud; I finished it grieving and grateful. Richard Fifield is the handsomest writer in North America, and perhaps its most compassionate." (Sharma Shields, author of *The Sasquatch Hunter's Almanac: A Novel*)

"Richard Fifield is sui generis, and so is his wonderful novel. It sets your hair on fire, and makes you laugh at the pretty flames." (Deirdre McNamer, author of *Red Rover* and *Rima in the Weeds*)

"Fifield's darkly humorous and deeply tender debut is an unforgettable carnival of glamorous outcasts, unforgivable women, violent bar brawls, and scrappy softball teams. In his small-town America, where every trailer, church, and bar holds equal capacity for heartbreak, revelation and forgiveness, he's unveiled an original vision of the West written in infield dirt, nail polish, and the blood of people we can't live without." (J. Ryan Stradal, author of *Kitchens of the Great Midwest*)

"Fifield's debut is an exaggerated, no-holds barred portrait of a small town that doesn't easily forget or forgive, and it turns alternately laugh-out-loud funny and...all-too-true." (*Booklist*)

"In Fifield's excellent fiction debut, alcoholic Rachel Flood returns to her hometown...This hilarious and profane story takes a tragic turn at the end, revealing just how fragile love and friendship can be." (*Publisher's Weekly*, *Starred Review*)

"Caustic wit, absurd plot turns and an ensemble cast of riotous characters infuse this outlandish yet moving novel about the hard-bitten bonds of community." (*Shelf Awareness*, *Starred Review*)

About the Author

Richard Fifield earned his MFA from Sarah Lawrence College in upstate New York. For the past twenty years he has worked as a social worker for adults with intellectual disabilities, while volunteering as a creative writing teacher in Missoula, Montana.

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The Flood Girls

Harmonica, December 1990



Every night, Frank played harmonica for the cats.

Jake Bailey watched as the feral creatures emerged from the carcass of a 1978 Ford Granada, from the piles of fiberglass insulation beneath the skeleton of a trailer that had been immolated by fire. The cats were skittish around people, yet they came to his neighbor's yard each evening. At seven o'clock sharp, Frank would play his harmonica and put out cans of food, and the cats would gather and rub up against his legs.

The two would talk to each other, while Jake sat in a lawn chair on the roof of his trailer house. Jake's mother, Krystal, found it odd that Frank talked at all, told Jake that Frank was the shyest person in Quinn, the only permanent stranger in a town of 956. Unlike Frank, his mother was well known, and as a nurse, she was useful. His mother refused to wear any makeup, despite her thin lips. Krystal had enormous green eyes and glossy brown hair that hung past her shoulder blades, content to be a natural beauty. She wore her hospital scrubs at home, and no jewelry. Jake found it frustrating to shop for his mother.

Jake had been coming to the rooftop since he was seven years old, when Krystal stopped noticing what he was doing as long as he was in the yard. From the roof, Jake could see all of the trailer court and parts of the town. He was twelve now, and he no longer spied on his neighbors. After five years, he realized that they were gross. Now he came to the roof for refuge. The space belonged to him, and he furnished it with a lawn chair and a waterproof tub that held his paperbacks, a parasol, and a pile of cassette singles. He sat on the roof through most of the year, sat there for hours, even in winter, when he sat until he could no longer bear it. His perch had revealed who was having affairs with the UPS man, who was eating too much when they thought nobody was watching, who was stealing checks from mailboxes. Jake was not a private detective, but he had a private-detective outfit. He also had several piles of polyester leisure suits and a complete set of motorcycle leathers.

Jake listened only to Madonna when he was on the roof. He listened to Madonna and watched the sky instead of the dirty loop of trailer houses; it was too painful to regard his tiny universe, the town seemed so foreshortened and filthy. His Walkman had a voracious appetite, and Jake had lost many cassettes, had tried to repair the ribbon when it stretched and wound until it broke. He fixed most of them with a cunning little piece of Scotch tape, and it usually worked, only a little blip and squeal before the gospel choir kicked in during "Like a Prayer."

He had found rosary beads at the thrift store, and he wore these as he listened to Madonna, even though he was not religious. He wore three necklaces at a time: glass, baby-blue stones, and wood. He knew he was supposed to say a prayer and finger every bead, but instead he named his enemies. It seemed impossible that he had fifty-nine enemies, but the football team took up thirty-two, and there were twenty-seven other bullies and assholes in town. According to Jake's math, he disliked one-sixteenth of the town. Frank was not one of them.

The cats came around despite the freezing weather. Some nights, Frank built a tiny fire in a washtub. He played his harmonica, surrounded by piles of empty cans of cat food, and the flames shone on the tins and cast the snowy yard in waves of reflected light.

When Frank wasn't playing music, he recited facts and observations to Jake: the harmonica was the Special

20, model number 560 manufactured by Hohner, plastic comb instead of wooden. Frank told Jake that feral cats woke at four in the afternoon, that their hunting parties went out at six, and then they went back to sleep after he fed them. The cats woke again at three in the morning, foraged for the next three hours, slept all day. Jake thought that they were much like Bert, Krystal's boyfriend.

Bert was a human barnacle that had attached itself to Jake and Krystal's trailer house in 1989. He courted them with shopping trips to Spokane, boxes of garage sale books, a new furnace for the trailer. He promised to be a father figure. As soon as Bert moved in, he never moved again, leaving the couch only to go to the bar. He was surly and possessive, drunk and useless, and worst of all, fertile. Krystal was pregnant within a month.

Before Bert came, Frank had built a small storage shed for Jake, shoved up against the siding, between the back door and Jake's bedroom window. Frank knew that Jake's thrift store purchases were piled to the ceiling in his bedroom, each article of clothing perfectly folded but sandwiched so tightly that Jake was constantly ironing. Frank worked silently, building the shed out of cedar, so Jake's clothes would smell less like old people and more like expensive people. He added a gambrel roof, sturdy enough to support Jake's weight. Now Jake could climb out of his bedroom window and use the roof of the storage shed to push himself up to the flat metal panels on the top of the trailer house.

After Bert moved in, Frank built a privacy fence around his entire property in the summer of 1990. Bert had started trapping Frank's feral cats in the alley, collecting them in metal cages. He drove to the boating launch and threw the cages in the shallows of the river. Bert described this process in detail but was secretive about what he did with the bodies. Frank's fence was six feet high, enough to shield Frank from the sight of Bert drinking in the yard, the sight of Bert entirely.

Jake's best friend, Misty, lived with her mother on the left side of Frank's new fence. They had grown up together in the trailer court, walking endlessly around the unpaved loop of twenty-six houses and a Laundromat, throwing rocks at swallows' nests. Misty blasted heavy metal at all hours.

Bert caused just as much commotion. When he had no one to fight with, Bert fought with himself, and loudly. Bert was the kind of drunk who fell on and off the wagon so many times that he called everybody at the bar by their last names and everybody at AA meetings by their first.

Frank was surrounded by this chaos but never called the cops. He was meek, a slight man with a thick dark beard. When he wasn't feeding the cats, he watched the mountains with binoculars. He told Jake that he used to spend his summers in the fire lookouts and that these habits were hard to break. He looked for fire, even in the winter. Frank wore only bright yellow work shirts and dark green pants, and he told Jake that he had retired early from the Forest Service but never explained why.

The week before Christmas, Jake combed through the thrift shop, found several suits that looked like they would fit. Frank was silent when Jake brought them to his front porch, wrapped carefully, freshly cleaned by hand.

"I guessed your sizes," Jake said. Frank said nothing, just accepted the neatly folded pile. "I thought you would look best in earth tones," explained Jake. "Browns and greens, mostly. You'll love the ties. I even found one with pine trees. There's also a gray-and-red plaid jacket, and I figured you could wear it with blue jeans. Do you own any blue jeans?"

Frank remained silent.

The next night, Jake took his place on the roof, careful not to trip on the wires of Christmas lights Krystal had draped over the gutters. He had finally bought the entire “Like a Prayer” album, and a different rosary for every track, upping his collection to fourteen. Plastic or pearl, he had a necklace for every song and wore them on the outside of his snowsuit. He wrapped himself in blankets; the lawn chair was covered in new snow, and he sat on a plastic bag so his pants wouldn’t get wet. Frank began his concert for the cats, but ended it early after only twenty minutes. He blew into his bare hands, which must have been frozen; Frank could not play harmonica with mittens. The cats ate greedily, and Jake watched a skinny pair fight over a can of pork and beans. Inside the trailer, Jake and Frank could hear Krystal and Bert fighting about getting cable television, and their new baby was crying. Frank walked over to the fence and threw the harmonica up to Jake, and then he turned away and went inside his house, without speaking a word.

The ambulance came the next day. Krystal heard the details on the police scanner and told Jake to go to his room. He watched out his window as the volunteer firemen came in their massive vehicles, followed closely by the van of the volunteer ambulance. There were no sirens. Then the cars came to the trailer court—the onlookers. It was as if every person who lived in town had heard the dispatch on the police scanner. Jake snuck out of his window and found Misty on the street. Even in the freezing cold, Bert lay drunkenly in the yard, tangled up in a lawn chair, but the crowd paid no attention. Misty and Jake hid in the alley, behind a Dumpster that was missing a wheel, and Misty smoked a cigarette as the volunteer fire department surrounded the stretcher.

Jake and Misty watched as they brought out Frank’s body.

“I bet it was suicide,” pronounced Misty. “That’s fucking hard-core.”

“He never told me he was sad,” said Jake.

“I wonder if he used a gun,” said Misty.

They watched until they were spotted by Krystal. “You shouldn’t be seeing this!” she yelled at them as they tried to cower behind the Dumpster.

The winter grew thicker and darker, and Jake still thought of Frank. He kept the harmonica under his bed. Every morning, Jake shoved open the back door, kicked at the snow that had piled upon the cinder blocks of the back steps, and trudged in his slippers to the storage shed. He thought of Frank as he picked out his clothes for the day. Krystal would not speak of Frank’s death, would not declare it a suicide. Bert claimed that the cats had eaten him.

For a few weeks, Jake bought cat food and stood in Frank’s backyard. The cats came, but Jake could only hum. Jake hung his glass rosary on Frank’s doorknob. The last week of January, Bert caught him and gave him a split lip for trespassing.

After that, Jake watched from the roof as the cats came around for a few more days, mewling and licking at the empty cans. Eventually, they found somewhere else to go. Jake hoped they were welcomed and serenaded, hoped they had found a new home.

By the time Jake’s lip healed, there were no more cats. Bert had trapped them all, Frank was gone, and only the harmonica remained. Frank’s yard and trailer stayed untouched, the snow piling in deeper drifts around the front door.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jerry Brock:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or read a book called The Flood Girls? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have various other opinion?

Gloria Smith:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The information you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want really feel happy read one together with theme for entertaining including comic or novel. The particular The Flood Girls is kind of book which is giving the reader erratic experience.

Laquita Horton:

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Robert Jones:

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