

Uncommon Weather: Alaska Stories

Richard Chiappone

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In Richard Chiappone's dark and humorous short story collection *Uncommon Weather*, people battle isolation, boredom, and existential anxiety.

These twelve intricate stories are set in Alaska's small towns and vast wildernesses and explore deep isolation. There are empathetic characters who are flawed and just shy of irredeemable; there are people with fresh wounds whose futures seem dismal. Climate change and infidelity cause existential insecurity too.

In the haunting story "Little Wing," a bush doctor misses her flight out of Anchorage and is left to sit at a restaurant watching the waitstaff try to feed a fallen nestling; thousands of miles away, her daughter's funeral takes place in Buffalo. In "Time on the Water," a man moves into his cabin on the Kenai Peninsula to fish his remaining years away in the wake of an amicable divorce and a terminal cancer diagnosis. There, he develops an unexpected appetite for outlaw life. In "Uncommon Weather," an environmental conservationist, disillusioned after years of dedication without impact, gives herself permission to have an extramarital affair unhindered by shame.

The stories' twists are a vicious combination of unforeseeable and inevitable. Herein, even formidable senses of humor come up short in the face of brutal tragedies and harrowing discoveries. Still, most of the endings skew hopeful, if lonely, with weighted optimism. This configuration is to a large extent shaped by the distance, jobs, and wilderness recreation that's unique to Alaska's geography, where relationships take on new stresses and significance.

Marked by alienation and a dark sense of humor, *Uncommon Weather* is a haunting collection of short stories about human burdens in a far corner of the world.

BEN LINDER (September / October 2024)

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