



# Florida

*Lauren Groff*

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***New York Times* bestseller Lauren Groff returns with an electric collection of stories as propulsive and consuming as her novel *Fates and Furies*.**

Lauren Groff is one of the most important authors writing today, and *Florida* -- her first new book since her "clear the ground triumph"\* *Fates and Furies* -- is an electrifying, expanding read.

Over a decade ago, Groff moved to her adopted home state of Florida. The stories in this collection span characters, towns, decades, even centuries, but Florida -- its landscape, climate, history, and state of mind -- becomes its gravitational center. Storms, snakes, and sinkholes lurk at the edge of everyday life, but the greater threats and mysteries are of a human, emotional, and psychological nature.

In "*The Midnight Zone*," a woman finds herself injured and isolated in a confined space with her children, danger literally prowling outside the door, and must confront what it is she is really afraid of. "*Above and Below*" follows a young homeless woman as she moves from one Florida beach town to another, finding increasingly precarious ways to survive. And "*Yport*" brilliantly explores the alternating fulfillment and anxiety of modern marriage and motherhood, all the more apparent when removed from routine American life.

Groff's evocative storytelling and knife-sharp intelligence first transport the reader, then jolt us alert with a crackle of wit, a wave of sadness, a flash of cruelty, as she writes about loneliness, rage, family, and the passage of time. With shocking accuracy and effect, Groff pinpoints the moments and decisions and connections behind human pleasure and pain, hope and despair, love and fury -- the moments that make us alive. Vigorous, startling, precise, and moving, *Florida* is a magnificent achievement.

(\**Washington Post*)

## Florida Details

Date : Published June 5th 2018 by Riverhead Books

ISBN :

Author : Lauren Groff

Format : Kindle Edition 288 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Contemporary, Literary Fiction

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# From Reader Review Florida for online ebook

## Kasa Cotugno says

During a recent visit, Lauren Groff shared that when her husband proposed moving back to his native Florida, she, appalled, made him sign a contract that they would leave in 10 years. That was more than 12 years ago. In the intervening years, she has come to love the state and all its weirdness, and even gave it the top acknowledgement for this, her excellent book of short stories. She knows she is a short story writer, having entered Amherst as an aspiring poet and having the intelligence to recognize that wasn't the path for her. She admits her forays into novels as an aberration (successful though those sidesteps may be), which explains why her stories are so rich, so immersive, and impossible to read in one gulp. They must be paced out. I've said in other reviews that when collections of short stories are good, they are hard work for a reader since it is like reading an entire shelf of well thought-out books, requiring more effort than say a 300 page novel.

What each story has in common here is someone in difficulty, either women or children, usually in danger from forces of nature rather than from another human being. That's what gives these stories their originality - the unpredictability, impersonality and power behind forces which one cannot control. There is much reference to literature that Groff holds dear (when asked, she responded that she read material she loved multiple times, e.g., she had read the first volume of Proust's *Remembrance of Time Past* at least 8 times but hadn't progressed to the other volumes), and one story delves into the personality of Guy de Maupassant. A very impressive collection from a more than impressive writer.

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## Marialyce says

Unfortunately, this book is going to be placed upon my DNF shelf. I absolutely loved Lauren Groff's *Fates and Furies* a five star read and more for me. However, this collection of short stories is doing nothing for me. The writing is wonderful but the characters and I are not making any connection at all and that makes the book drag for me.

So sorry to say I will stop at the 30% mark. Perhaps someday I will go back to it.

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## Dan says

I really liked this collection! As a Florida boy, I had high expectations and Groff met them and surpassed them. She captured the other side of the place that tourists — and the popular imagination — often miss, the grittiness and the quiet desperation. This collection is filled with a palpable sense of danger lurking around every corner in the natural world. The protagonists go to great lengths to protect themselves from panthers, gators, snakes, hurricanes, etc., but time and again find the greatest threats to come from the inside. There's also a strong thread of existential panic over global warming, which is quite appropriate for a book that takes as its subject Florida, a state with much to lose as sea levels rise and the climate warms.

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## Rose (Traveling Sister) says

2.5 stars

Apparently, there is nothing more to write about in Florida besides miserable mothers, storms, and snakes. At its best, the short stories in Groff's new collection read like rough studies of Carson McCullers. There's Southern Gothic elements: anthropomorphized desperation, fleeting, mysterious characters, and the sense that life is essentially a giant screwball carnival. "Eyewall," "Salvador," and "Dogs Go Wolf" were about the only stories I'd deem successful.

At its worst, *Florida* is a hodgepodge of stream-of-consciousness and forced metaphors. And when I say forced, I mean, **forced in a way that insults the senses**. This was such a detrimental part of the book that I think it's worth exploring a bit more in-depth:

"I had lost so much weight by then that I carried myself delicately, as if I'd gone translucent."  
*Are you cellophane? A ghost? A bubble? Please advise.*

"...the cheeks of my sleeping children, creamy as cheeses."  
*CREAMY. AS. CHEESES?!?!*

"My rebelliousness at the time was like a sticky fog..."  
*And then my mind goes blank. I put down the book and rub my eyes. Can these sentences be real?*

*Watching people eat pizza is NOT like water dropping down an icicle. It never has been, and it never will be. A light bulb is not an egg and a woman is not a chicken, LAUREN.*

Most of these garbled metaphors occur in the stories narrated by the only recurring character, a suburban housewife experiencing general ennui and who seems to not know where the fuck she is 90% of the time. In fact, most of the stories feature women who just don't know who, what, or where they are. Nevertheless, I persisted.

It really is a shame, because Groff clearly understands good writing. She obviously had something specific in mind for this book, and she probably could've achieved that if it wasn't for the crazy number of stories (thirteen in under 300 pages). That'd be a lot even if most of them had ended logically. As is, almost no dots were connected, no issues resolved, and very few questions answered. If there'd been half as many stories and twice as much character development/background, this could've been very impressive.

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## Dianne says

Here's the thing - I really do love Groff's writing. These short stories are no exception; she is a master craftsman. She paints so well with her words and phrasing. It's just that....I don't do so well with "dark," and all eleven of these stories are pretty dark. I don't think Lauren Groff likes Florida very much!

Here's what I took away from this collection:

*Florida is mold, feral cats, snakes, bugs, humidity, rot, spanish moss, vines, gators, sinkholes, homelessness, tent cities, termites, mosquitos, hurricanes, lizards, panthers, "a damp and dense tangle," bleaching sun, dread and heat*

*Motherhood is something to be deeply conflicted about. When in doubt, drink heavily.*

*Everyone is lonely; loneliness is everywhere and ghosts surround you. When lonely, drink heavily.*

*Men are predatory scum, rapists, abusive, devious, self-involved OR tender and kind fathers/husbands OR any combination of the above - yet another thing to be deeply conflicted about.*

*Global warming / climate change is something to obsess about on a daily basis.*

These are all really well articulated stories, but they are also disturbingly bleak. I was relieved to be done with the book.

A 4 for the writing, a 3 for how much I "liked" it. If Goodreads allowed it, I would give this a 3.5, but rounding down to a 3 because I just didn't "really like" it. I'm spending two weeks in Florida in October. That gives me just over 3 months to shake this off!

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## **Esil says**

3+ stars

I loved Lauren Groff's *Fates and Furies*. I thought the writing was absolutely brilliant and the story and characters were really original. So I was pretty excited to get my hands on *Florida*, which is Groff's latest short story collection. Unfortunately, I can't rave about the stories in the same way I raved about *Fates and Furies*. I recognize her talented writing, but there was a flat clever feel to her stories that made it hard for me to feel engaged. Most of the stories focused on women, often with young children, often in Florida, often with distant husbands, often dark, and all struggling with internal personal turmoil. Some stories were definitely better than others. There was one set during a wind storm in Florida, with a woman alone at home with her two boys that really got my attention. And she really captures the nuances of mothers' love for young children. There's a creepy story about two young girls left alone on an island. But, overall, these stories didn't have me particularly excited. And I must also warn that it's definitely not a book for who are afraid of snakes. Thanks to Edelweiss and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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## **Rebecca Renner says**

I loved this book so much that I think I want to reread it. Some of the stories hearken back to Groff's *Arcadia* (my previous favorite of her books), and others chart new territory entirely. The stories themselves are both domestic and exotic, and they are deeply rooted in the state I love. I'm so used to reading literary fiction that's very New York-centric, so it was both delightful and strange to recognize the city where I was born (Gainesville) as the setting for many of these stories.

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## Rebecca Foster says

Two major, connected threads in this superb story collection are ambivalence about Florida, and ambivalence about motherhood. There's an oppressive atmosphere throughout, with environmental catastrophe an underlying threat. Set-ups vary in scope from almost the whole span of a life to one scene. A dearth of named characters emphasizes just how universal the scenarios and emotions are. Groff's style is like a cross between Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and her unexpected turns of phrase jump off the page.

The narrator of "The Midnight Zone," staying with her sons in a hunting camp 20 miles from civilization, ponders the cruelty of time and her failure to be sufficiently maternal, while the woman in "Flower Hunters" is so lost in an eighteenth-century naturalist's book that she forgets to get Halloween costumes for her kids. A few favorites of mine were "Ghosts and Empties," in which the narrator goes for long walks at twilight and watches time passing through the unwitting tableaux of the neighbors' windows; "Eyewall," a matter-of-fact ghost story; and "Above and Below," in which a woman slips into homelessness – it's terrifying how precarious her life is at every step.

*Florida* feels innovative and terrifyingly relevant. Any one of its stories is a bracing read; together they form a masterpiece.

(I reviewed this for the May 30th *Stylist* "Book Wars" column.)

### Some favorite lines:

"What had been built to seem so solid was fragile in the face of time because time is impassive, more animal than human. Time would not care if you fell out of it. It would continue on without you." (from "The Midnight Zone")

"The wind played the chimney until the whole place wheezed like a bagpipe." (from "Eyewall")

"everybody is sleeping save for the tree frogs and the sinners" (from "Snake Stories")

"How lonely it would be, the mother thinks, looking at her children, to live in this dark world without them." (from "Yport")

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## Resh (The Book Satchel) says

4.5 stars

The writing is brilliant - slow, atmospheric, dark, vulnerable characters and has themes of loneliness, grief and loss. The book is a delight from start to the end. If you enjoy stories for their quality of narration and not necessarily look for a definitive ending, this one's for you. An excellent short story collection of 2018

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## **Hannah says**

Any book called “Florida” needs to be infused by a thorough sense of place and Lauren Groff does just that. I have been a fan since *LOVING FATES AND FURIES* a few years back and have been meaning to pick up more of her books and this very strong collection of short stories has cemented her place in my heart.

While not every story is set in Florida, Groff’s protagonists all have a connection to that place, a connection they sometimes strain against and sometimes welcome. Her protagonists are women, depressed and difficult and wonderfully flawed women, often mothers with a difficult and believable relationship to motherhood. I loved the way these women are allowed to be difficult while Groff shines an unflinching spotlight on them and their flaws and the way they are suffocating in their own skin. I adore that they can be unpleasant while ultimately staying sympathetic. I do wish this unpleasantness did not always also show itself in a disdain for their own and other bodies. Once I noticed that I could not unsee it. I would have liked there to be more variety in their deepest flaws because as it is the fixation on (often overweight) bodies feels unkind and unnecessary.

Lauren Groff is in perfect command of her language; her sentences are sharp in the way that I like them to be in realistic short fiction (comparisons to Roxane Gay came to mind here and that is obviously one of the highest compliments I can give a short story writer). The stories are meticulously structured and surprising while her perfect tone is recognizable in all of them.

Now, excuse me while I buy everything else she has ever written.

I received an arc of this book courtesy of NetGalley and Random House UK, Cornerstone in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Jessica Woodbury says**

I have spent a long time thinking Lauren Groff and I just weren't a fit. Before this I'd read all three of her novels, and while I liked each better than the last, her distinctive style and prose were never the things that I liked the most. A story collection didn't seem like a good bet for us, since story collections tend to lean into an author's style and give less opportunities for the big plots that I've preferred from her. Ultimately I decided to try it, and I decided to do the audio since Groff reads it herself. And now I can't say Groff and I aren't a fit because I fell deeply, passionately in love with this collection from the start and now I'm very sad that it's over. I can't remember the last time a collection made me feel that way.

Like many of my favorite collections, these stories have similarities and themes that weave them together, while also standing apart independently as perfect little slices of story. The stories are mostly about women, and there is an undercurrent of danger and dread that runs through them. It can be the small dangers of the everyday (like the story where a mother in a cabin with her kids on vacation falls off a stool while changing a lightbulb, which only confirmed every fear I have ever had) or the larger threats of instability that can upset a seemingly stable life.

The Florida of the title is a place where alligators and snakes can prowl through leafy suburbs. It is a place



where a storm can destroy the strongest buildings with wind or flood or fire. It is too hot and too humid and it feels as though everything people create could dissolve into a sinkhole in an instant. The waters could rise and it could all be gone. Perhaps it is the right book for me in this moment, many of these stories are about women who have comfortable lives and yet there is a thrum of a threat all around them, a feeling that violence or loss could strike immediately, or that a slow unsuspecting death could sneak in without anyone realizing it.

The stories of comfortable women are mixed in with those who are not comfortable at all. One story is about two young sisters who end up abandoned on an island, slowly starving. Another follows a grad student who ends up homeless, moving from her car to a tent city to a motel, losing her old self bit by bit. There is always the feeling that any of these women could be any of the other women. That we are seeing them at one moment, but things could get better or things could get worse and it could all be lost or gained. Those who have lost are somehow more calm than those who have not yet lost but could at any moment.

And, of course, as you'd expect from an excellent story collection, there is perfect prose, that sees the exact details of the everyday, sly and insightful and clear. There is deep insight of who these characters are and how they see the world that also lets you understand how the world sees them. I particularly enjoyed Groff's keen understanding of parenting, its monotony and its unexpected moments of extreme emotion. The children in her stories are often a little precious, but that is because every parent sees their child that way, as golden, blessed beings.

I could read a hundred more stories from Groff, and I particularly enjoyed her narration, the way she pauses around words, the occasional lilt in her voice. I often listened to these stories while walking around a Southern pond, encountering frogs and cranes and even (as if conjured into existence) a snake, and I cannot think of a better way to read the book.

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### **Amy says**

This book doesn't bother with quotation marks, and it's full of snakes. I hate both of those things. Yet here I am, giving it 5 stars. Enough said.

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### **Neil says**

This was my first real experience of Groff. The final story in this collection, Yport, was included in Granta 139: Best of Young American Novelists 3 which I read several months ago, but that didn't help me much because it has been so majorly re-worked by the time it gets into this collection that it is almost a new piece (same basic story, but significantly edited): I was comparing the two for the first few paragraphs, but the changes are so numerous and significant that I gave up and I'm not sure how much the versions diverged in the end.

The state of Florida is the unifying element in all the stories presented here, although this doesn't mean that all the stories are set in Florida, simply that all the protagonists have a connection with the place. Salvador, for example, is set in Brazil as the protagonist explores an unknown city (in a rather dissolute fashion, it has to be said). And Yport that I have already mentioned is set in France where a woman travels to the town to continue her research in Guy de Maupassant. But many of the stories do take place in Florida. It doesn't

come over as the sunshine state! It seems that along with lurking hurricanes and far too many snakes for my personal taste, there are a lot of sad and lonely people and a fair amount of poverty. In one story, a woman sits out a hurricane in her house, in another a woman struggles with her snake-obsessed husband. In the opening story, a woman wanders the streets at night to help her stress levels and observes her neighbourhood.

In many of the stories, I admired the writing. Groff has an observant eye and an interesting turn of phrase. The individual stories are often well-told with occasional flashes of humour. There are some links between the stories with images or brief moments recalling earlier parts of the book. But the overall impression, of women who are depressed or struggling with life in some way or other, gets a bit heavy if you read the book cover to cover as I have done. I also found the way that so many of the stories ended very suddenly and often by leaping off at a tangent rather repetitive in the end (stories seem to suddenly leap forward for a glimpse of the character decades later, for example, or, in some cases, jump into what almost seems to be a different story just for the final paragraph). Perhaps this is a book that is better enjoyed by reading one story at a time?

Overall, I enjoyed the writing and I liked several of the stories, but I found the complete collection rather hard work to get through. From my perspective, I would advise readers to take their time with this and spread it out.

My thanks to the publisher for a review copy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## **PattyMacDotComma says**

### **3.5~4★**

**“When she was pregnant with Jude’s sister, she came into the bathroom to take a cool bath one August night and, without her glasses, missed the three-foot albino alligator her husband had stored in the bathtub. The next morning, she was gone.”**

Florida. Hot, sticky, treacherous, or as one character says **“damp, dense tangle. An Eden of dangerous things.”** I have spent time there, and I now live in a similar climate in Australia, so I can easily imagine myself in many of these stories. **“Moving in the humidity was like forcing my way through wet silk.”**

The Florida storms are horrific and frightening and wonderfully described. Standing next to the edge of a sinkhole in the rain must be terrifying, too. Climate change gets more than a passing mention in a few stories, because Florida, of course, is already being inundated by rising seas and hit by heavy storms.

One woman has exhausted her best friend’s patience with her constant worries about the future to the point that the friend has asked to take a break from her. She just wishes she could take a break from herself!

Most of the main characters are of a youngish or early middle-age group, although there is one in particular who worried about becoming what is often referred to a ‘woman of a certain age’. She had rented an apartment in Salvador for a two-week escape from caring for her elderly mother. Her guilt-ridden sisters paid for her holiday every year, so she goes to live it up.

**“Helena was in that viscous pool of years in her late thirties when she could feel her beauty slowly departing from her. She had been lovely at one time, which slid into pretty, which slid into attractive, and now, if she didn’t do something major to halt the slide, she’d end up at handsomely middle-aged,**

**which was no place at all to be.”**

I’d be happy with “handsomely middle-aged”, but then I’m not trying to party hearty, fitting in a year’s worth of escapades into a couple of weeks. Poor Helena.

There’s no question that Groff is a good writer. I think if I’d read any of these stories separately in *The New Yorker Magazine* or other publications where her writing appears, I’d have seriously enjoyed them. As it is, I found them repetitive and unrelentingly dismal.

From the woman who goes running to escape – her husband, her kids, the nightly chores of bath and bed (or maybe life itself) – to the woman who takes her two little boys to France to escape Florida, with its storms, snakes and deadly creatures in the dark. There is a lot of bemoaning their condition and a lot of drinking of wine. Bottle after bottle, drunk alone.

I felt as if all these women could be summed up by the one who took her little boys overseas, hoping to enjoy a voyage of self-discovery.

**“She doesn’t belong in France, perhaps she never did; she was always simply her flawed and neurotic self, even in French. Of all places in the world, she belongs in Florida. How dispiriting, to learn this of herself.”**

Dispirited is how I felt most of the time while reading this, and annoyed, because it is obvious to me that this is someone whose writing I’d enjoy, but not about women like this who all seem to be slightly different but equally miserable versions of each other. I waited a few days to write this, and I have to admit I find it hard to remember any of them separately. They’ve all melded together, single, married, rich or poor.

I will definitely look for Groff’s highly acclaimed first book, though.

Thanks to NetGalley and Random House / William Heinemann for the preview copy from which I’ve quoted.

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## **Emily May says**

*The truth might be moral, but it isn't always right.*

Snakes, gators, swamps and storms form the backdrop of these exquisitely human stories.

I have to say I enjoyed Florida so much more than Fates and Furies. Groff’s writing style is dense and wordy, metaphorical and poetic and - sometimes - exhausting. Reading her full-length novel was a chore, but for me at least, **Groff seems born to write short stories**. Small, hard-hitting snippets of lives that still make you feel emotionally-drained, but also thoughtful and satisfied.

The natural wonders and dangers of Florida play into almost all these stories. A snake devotee meets his end in the wilderness, at the hands of his life’s passion. A stressed mother of two boys is injured in a literal cabin in the woods. Two abandoned children fight against starvation.

It's a book about people - often women and mothers, but not always - becoming unmoored and losing their way. The opening story is about a woman who takes to walking at night to calm her recently-acquired propensity for yelling. During these strolls, she observes her neighbors through their windows, unveiling pockets of their lives in punchy descriptions. It's amazing how much you can learn just by watching people.

For the most part, the stories seem to be narrating a series of events in intricate detail, observing nature and moments between people. But then, once in a while, Groff delivers a perfect line that captures a widespread thought or fear, tapping deep into the human psyche and offering insight.

**It's extremely powerful.**

CW: Child abuse/neglect; rape (non-graphic); general anxiety/depression.

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