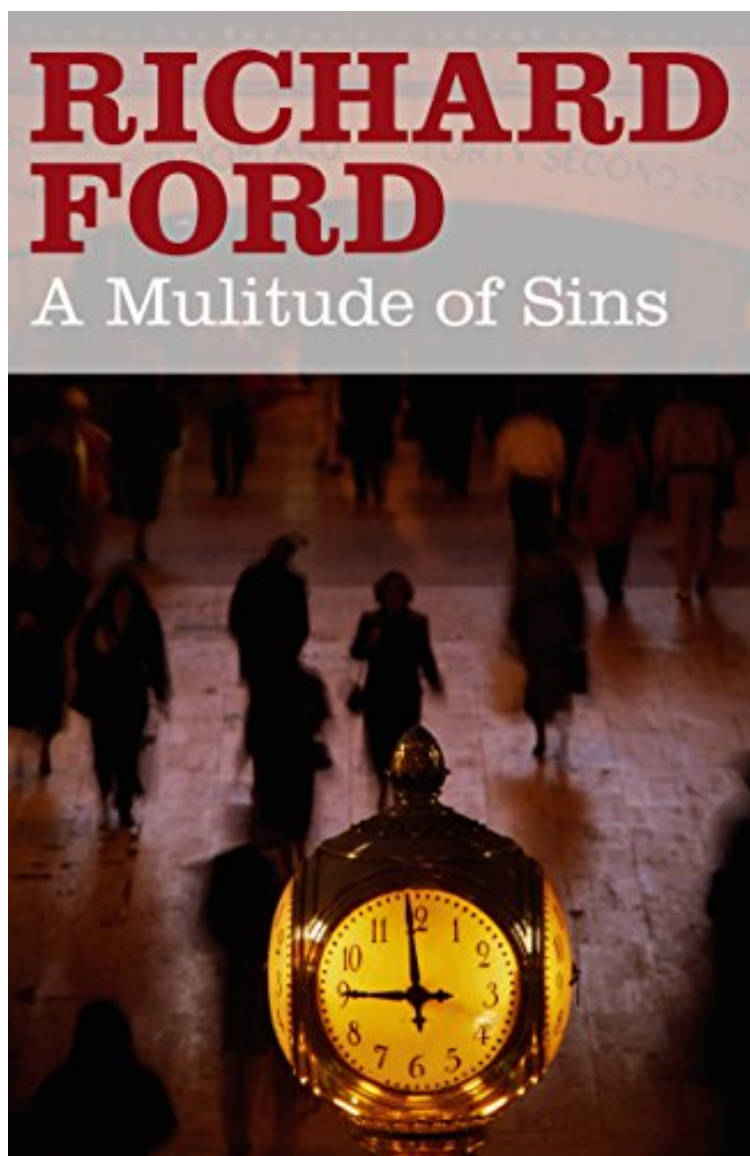


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## A Multitude of Sins



*Par Richard Ford*

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**Par Richard Ford : A Multitude of Sins** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Multitude of Sins:

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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn each of these tales master storyteller Richard Ford is drawn to the themes of intimacy, love, and their failures. An illicit visit to the Grand Canyon reveals a vastness even more profound; an exacting career woman celebrates Christmas with her adamantly post-nuclear family; a couple weekending in Maine try to recapture the ardour that has disappeared, both gradually and suddenly, from their lives; on a spring evening's drive, a young wife confesses to her husband the affair she had with the host of the dinner party they're about to join. .comLove, and our frequent failure to meet its challenges, is the subject of Richard Ford's wonderfully insightful collection of short stories, A Multitude of Sins. The understated prose is shot through with an incisive, empathetic, and not at all cynical understanding of the

psyche of Middle America, with which fans of Ford's previous novels, *The Sportswriter* and its Pulitzer Prize-winning sequel, *Independence Day*, will be familiar. These stories are inhabited by characters for whom love has become a moral maze rather than a clearly defined path towards fulfillment. In "Reunion," a man accidentally encounters the husband of a woman with whom he had an affair, and he is forced to relive an episode of his life he would rather have forgotten. In another story, a young couple is driving to a dinner party when the wife discloses an affair that she's been having with their host. Ford seems to be more interested in examining the aftermath of their infidelities than the affairs themselves--in particular, what happens when intimacy fails to provide the anticipated satisfaction. There are no easy, moral solutions at the end of each tale, no sense of peace or wisdom that the characters can attain. Instead, they are left to contemplate the repercussions of their actions and to try to salvage some greater self-understanding from the morass. By holding up this mirror to our own lives, Ford renders *A Multitude of Sins* an unsettling but rewarding read. --Jane Morris, .co.uk

Extraitprivacy This was at a time when my marriage was still happy. We were living in a large city in the northeast. It was winter. February. The coldest month. I was, of course, still trying to write, and my wife was working as a translator for a small publishing company that specialized in Czech scientific papers. We had been married for ten years and were still enjoying that strange, exhilarating illusion that we had survived the worst of life's hardships. The apartment we rented was in the old factory section on the south end of the city, the living space only a great, empty room with tall windows front and back, and almost no electric light. The natural light was all. A famous avant-garde theater director had lived in the room before and put on his jagged, nihilistic plays there, so that all the walls were painted black, and along one were still riser seats for his small disaffected audiences. Our bed--my wife's and mine--was in one dark corner where we'd arranged some of the tall, black-canvas scenery drops for our privacy. Though, of course, there was no one for us to need privacy from. Each night when my wife came back from her work, we would go out into the cold, shining streets and find a restaurant to have our meal in. Later we would stop for an hour in a bar and have coffee or a brandy, and talk intensely about the translations my wife was working on, though never (blessedly) about the work I was by then already failing at. Our wish, needless to say, was to stay out of the apartment as long as we could. For not only was there almost no light inside, but each night at seven the building's owner would turn off the heat, so that by ten--on our floor, the highest--it was too cold to be anywhere but in bed piled over with blankets, barely able to move. My wife, at that time, was working long hours and was always fatigued, and although sometimes we would come home a little drunk and make love in the dark bed under blankets, mostly she would fall straight into bed exhausted and be snoring before I could climb in beside her. And so it happened that on many nights that winter, in the cold, large, nearly empty room, I would be awake, often wide awake from the strong coffee we'd drunk. And often I would walk the floor from window to window, looking out into the night, down to the vacant street or up into the ghostly sky that burned with the shimmering luminance of the city's buildings, buildings I couldn't even see. Often I had a blanket or sometimes two around my shoulders, and I wore the coarse heavy socks I'd kept from when I was a boy. It was on such a cold night that--through the windows at the back of the flat, windows giving first onto an alley below, then farther across a space where a wire factory had been demolished, providing a view of buildings on the street parallel to ours--I saw, inside a long, yellow-lit apartment, the figure of a woman slowly undressing, from all appearances oblivious to the world outside the window glass. Because of the distance, I could not see her well or at all clearly, could only see that she was small in stature and seemingly thin, with close-cropped dark hair--a petite woman in every sense. The yellow light in the room where she was seemed to blaze and made her skin bronze and shiny, and her movements, seen through the windows, appeared stylized and slightly unreal, like the movements of a silhouette or in an old motion picture. I, though, alone in the frigid dark, wrapped in blankets that covered my head like a shawl, with my wife sleeping, oblivious, a few paces away--I was rapt by this sight. At first I moved close to the window glass, close enough to feel the cold on my cheeks. But then, sensing I might be noticed even at that distance, I slipped back into the room. Eventually I went to the corner and clicked off the small lamp my wife kept beside our bed, so that I was totally hidden in the dark. And after another few minutes I went to a drawer and found the pair of silver opera glasses which the theater director had left, and took them near the window and watched the woman across the space of darkness from my own space of darkness. I don't know all that I thought. Undoubtedly I was aroused. Undoubtedly I was thrilled by the secrecy of watching out of the dark. Undoubtedly I loved the very illicitness of it, of my wife sleeping nearby and knowing nothing of what I was doing. It is also possible I even liked the cold as it surrounded me, as complete as the night itself, may even have felt that the sight of the woman--whom I took to be young and lacking caution or discretion--

held me somehow, insulated me and made the world stop and be perfectly expressible as two poles connected by my line of vision. I am sure now that all of this had to do with my impending failures. Nothing more happened. Though, in the nights to come I stayed awake to watch the woman, letting my wife go off to sleep in her fatigue. Each night, and for a week following, the woman would appear at her window and slowly disrobe in her room (a room I never tried to imagine, although on the wall behind her was what looked like a drawing of a springing deer). Once her clothes were shed away, exposing her bony shoulders and small breasts and thin legs and rib cage and modest, rounded stomach, the woman would for a while cast about the room in the bronze light, window to window, enacting what seemed to me a kind of languid, ritual dance or a pattern of possibly theatrical movements, rising and bowing and extending her arms, arching her neck, while making her hands perform graceful tilting gestures I didn't understand and did not try to, taken as I was by her nakedness and by the sight on occasion of the dark swatch of hair between her legs. It was all arousal and secrecy and illicitness and really nothing else. This I did for a week, as I said, and then I stopped. Simply one night, draped again in blankets, I went to the window with my opera glasses, saw the lights on across the vacant space. For a while I saw no one. And then for no particular reason I turned and got into bed with my wife, warm and smelling of brandy and sweat and sleep under her blankets, and went to sleep myself, never thinking to look through the window again. Though one afternoon a week after I had stopped watching through the window, I left my desk in a moment of frustration and pointless despair, and stalked out into the winter daylight and up along the row of fashionable businesses where the old buildings were being restyled as dress shops and successful artists' galleries. I walked right to the river, clogged then with great squares of gray ice. I walked on to the university section, nearly to where my wife was at that hour working. And then, as the light was failing, I started back toward my street, my face hard with cold, my shoulders stiff, my gloveless hands frozen and red. As I turned a corner to take a quicker route back to my block, I found that I was unexpectedly passing before the building into which I had for days been spying. Something about it made me know it, though I'd never been aware of walking past there before, or even seen it in daylight. And just at that moment, letting herself into the building's tall front door, was the woman I had watched for those several nights and taken pleasure and undoubtedly secret consolation from. I knew her face, naturally--small and round and, as I saw, impassive. And to my surprise though not to my chagrin, she was old. Possibly she was seventy or even older. A Chinese, dressed in thin black trousers and a thin black coat, inside which she must've been as cold as I was. Indeed, she must've been freezing. She was carrying plastic bags of groceries slung to her arms and clutched in her hands. When I stopped and looked at her she turned and gazed down the steps at me with an expression I can only think now was indifference mingled with just the smallest recognition of threat. She was old, after all. I might suddenly have felt the urge to harm her, and easily could've. But of course that was not my thought. She turned back to the door and seemed to hurry her key into the lock. She looked my way once more, as I heard the bolt shoot profoundly back. I said nothing, did not even look at her again. I didn't want her to think my mind contained what it did and also what it did not. And I walked on then, feeling oddly but in no way surprisingly betrayed, simply passed on down the street toward my room and my own doors, my life entering, as it was at that moment, its first, long cycle of necessity. quality time

Where he stopped for the red light on busy Sheridan Road, Wales watched a woman fall down in the snow. A sudden loss of footing on the slick, walked-over hummock the plows had left at the crosswalk. Must be old, Wales thought, though it was dark and he couldn't see her face, only her fall--backwards. She wore a long gray, man's coat and boots and a knitted cap pulled down. Or else, of course, she was drinking, he supposed, watching her through his salted windshield as he waited. She could be younger, too. Younger and drinking. Wales was driving to The Drake to spend the night with a woman named Jena, a married woman whose husband had done colossally well in real estate. Jena had taken a suite in The Drake for a week--to paint. She was forty. She had her husband's permission. They--she and Wales--had done this five nights in a row now. He wanted it to go on. Wales had worked abroad for fourteen years, writing for various outlets--in Barcelona, Stockholm, Berlin. Always in English. He'd lately realized he'd been away too long, had lost touch with things American. But a friend from years ago, a reporter he'd known in London, had called and said, come back, come home, come to Chicago, teach a seminar on exactly what it's like to be James Wales. Just two days a week, for a couple of months, then back to Berlin. "The Literature of the Actual," his friend who'd become a professor had said, and laughed. It was funny. Like Hegel was funny. None of the students took it too seriously. The woman who'd fal...