All the King's Men

These three stories are wrought in the usual craftsmanlike way which we expect from so experienced a writer. They are imaginative and out of the ordinary but not easy and so unlikely to reach a wide audience. I found the dialogue, especially, needed concentration. The title story concerns the hard lives of dwarfs in the court of the king of Spain ('thing of Velasquez' paintings). They each have a handicap ... 'He could not knock himself senseless because he was that already', and their position was nothing short of utterly precarious, not least from the strangulating ministrations of the Infants, the King's six-year-old daughter. However, the King's second marriage and an Archbishop's kindly intercession does finally result in a heartwarming change of fortune. The second tale concerns the superstition that surrounds the mysterious Faransay Island, where a 'Gift' of a boy is offered when villagers collect their lambs: and in the third Kirsty comes to see the real implications of Grandpa's far-fetched tale of the Pillar of Stony Ray.

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