

The
NORTON
ANTHOLOGY
of
SHORT
FICTION

EIGHTH EDITION

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darker skin, the Hispanics and light-skinned blacks and all the others, babies of a kind he never saw in Sweden.

Well, he thought, why not? Now that they had done this to him.

He felt himself nodding. Sure. That American word. His right arm rose. He pointed at a baby whose skin was the color of clay, the color of polished bronze, or flames. Now the nurse was wheeling the baby he had pointed to closer to the window. When it was directly in front of him, she left it there, returning to the back of the nursery. Standing on the other side of the glass, staring down at the sleeping infant, he tapped on the panel twice and waved, as he thought fathers should. The baby did not awaken. Anders put his hand in his pocket and touched the little turquoise heart, then pressed his forehead against the glass of the window and recovered himself. He stood for what seemed to him a long time, before taking the elevator down to the ground floor and stepping out onto the front sidewalk, and to the air, which smelled as it always had, of powerful combustible materials and their traces, fire and ash.

1990

RELATED:

—Baxter on William Maxwell's "The Thistles in Sweden," p. 1756

ANN BEATTIE

b. 1947



Beattie was born in Washington, D.C., and attended both American University and the University of Connecticut. Subsequently, she taught at Harvard and the University of Virginia. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and has built a broad reputation for the many stories she has published in *The New Yorker*, establishing her as a spokesperson for the generation of the 1960s as her characters adapt—or fail to adapt—to the oncoming years. She writes of those who took the 1960s to be a Golden Age and cannot free themselves from the enchantment of their youth. Her books of short stories include *Distortions* (1976), *The Burning House* (1982), *What Was Mine* (1991), and *Selected Stories* (1999), and *Follies* (2005). A collection of her *New Yorker* stories was published in 2011. Her novels include *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1976), *Falling in Place* (1980), *Love Always* (1985), *Picturing Will* (1990), *My Life, Starting Dara Falcon* (1997), *Perfect Recall* (2000), *The Doctor's House* (2001), and *Mrs. Nixon* (2011). In 2005 Beattie won the Rea Award for the Short Story.

Snow

remember the cold night you brought in a pile of logs and a chipmunk jumped off as you lowered your arms. "What do you think *you're* doing in here?" you said, as it ran through the living room. It went through the library and stopped at the front door as though it knew the house well. This would be difficult for anyone to believe, except perhaps as the subject of a poem. Our first week in the house was spent scraping, finding some of the house's secrets, like wallpaper underneath wallpaper. In the kitchen, a pattern of white-gold trellises supported purple grapes as big and round as Ping-Pong balls. When we painted the walls yellow, I thought of the bits of grape that remained underneath and imagined the vine popping through, the way some plants can tenaciously push through anything. The day of the big snow, when you had to shovel the walk and couldn't find your cap and asked me how to wind a towel so that it would stay on your head—you, in the white towel turban, like a crazy king of snow. People liked the idea of our being together, leaving the city for the country. So many people visited, and the fireplace made all of them want to tell amazing stories: the child who happened to be standing on the right corner when the door of the ice-cream truck came open and hundreds of Popsicles crashed out; the man standing on the beach, sand sparkling in the sun, one bit glinting more than the rest, scooping to find a diamond

ring. Did they talk about amazing things because they thought we'd turn into one of them? Now I think they probably guessed it wouldn't work. It was as hopeless as giving a child a matched cup and saucer. Remember the night, out on the lawn, knee-deep in snow, chins pointed at the sky as the wind whirled down all that whiteness? It seemed that the world had been turned upside down, and we were looking into an enormous field of Queen Anne's lace.¹ Later, headlights off, our car was the first to ride through the newly fallen snow. The world outside the car looked solarized.

You remember it differently. You remember that the cold settled in stages, that a small curve of light was shaved from the moon night after night, until you were no longer surprised the sky was black, that the chipmunk ran to hide in the dark, not simply to a door that led to its escape. Our visitors told the same stories people always tell. One night, giving me a lesson in storytelling, you said, "Any life will seem dramatic if you omit mention of most of it."

This, then, for drama: I drove back to that house not long ago. It was April, and Allen had died. In spite of all the visitors, Allen, next door, had been the good friend in bad times. I sat with his wife in their living room, looking out the glass doors to the backyard, and there was Allen's pool, still covered with black plastic that had been stretched across it for winter. It had rained, and as the rain fell, the cover collected more and more water until it finally spilled onto the concrete. When I left that day, I drove past what had been our house. Three or four crocuses were blooming in the front—just a few dots of white, no field of snow. I felt embarrassed for them. They couldn't compete.

This is a story, told the way you say stories should be told: Somebody grew up, fell in love, and spent a winter with her lover in the country. This, of course, is the barest outline, and futile to discuss. It's as pointless as throwing birdseed on the ground while snow still falls fast. Who expects small things to survive when even the largest get lost? People forget years and remember moments. Seconds and symbols are left to sum things up: the black shroud over the pool. Love, in its shortest form, becomes a word. What I remember about all that time is one winter. The snow. Even now, saying "snow," my lips move so that they kiss the air.

No mention has been made of the snowplow that seemed always to be there, scraping snow off our narrow road—an artery cleared, though neither of us could have said where the heart was.

1983

RELATED:

—Beattie on Peter Taylor's "A Spinster's Tale," p. 1756

1. *Daucus carota*, the wild form of the carrot, which has flat clusters of tiny white flowers.

MADISON SMARTT BELL

b. 1957



Bell was born in Tennessee and received his B.A. from Princeton and his M.F.A. from Hollins College. He has taught writing at the University of Iowa, the Bennington Writing Workshop, Johns Hopkins University, and Vassar College and currently directs the creative writing program at Goucher College. His short stories are collected in *Zero db and Other Stories* (1987) and *Barling Man* (1990). His most recent novels include *Save Me, Joe Lewis* (1993), *All Souls' Rising* (1995), *Ten Indians* (1996), *Master of the Crossroads* (2000), *Anything Goes* (2002), *The Stone That the Builder Refused* (2004), *Charm City* (2007), *Devil's Dream* (2009), and *The Color of Night* (2011).

Witness

he day he heard that Paxton Morgan was released, Wilson had been planning to revise a will. It was a slack period for him and he didn't expect to be in court until late in the following week, but he'd come in early just the same. The door to his inner office was open on the lateral hallway, and he could hear the whisk of a letter opener as Mrs. Veech, behind the front desk, sliced into the morning mail. Mostly bills or offers of subscriptions, he'd glanced through it quickly on his way in.

There was a jingle as the front door opened and Wilson raised his head to listen, but it was a man he didn't want to see, and Mrs. Veech denied his presence. A grumble, sound of pacing, scrape of a match and a faint distant odor of tobacco. Mrs. Veech coughed. The voice grudgingly inquired if the smoke bothered her. Mrs. Veech said nothing but coughed again, more significantly. Her allergy to cigarettes was highly selective—Wilson, for instance, smoked himself. When the front door released a jangle of departure, he picked up his pencil and went back to the will. Mrs. Veech, he could hear, was dealing with the remains of the mail.

"Mr. Wilson, did you know they were letting Pax Morgan go?"

He heard her voice without immediately understanding it, registering only the anxiously rising note at the end. The task in his hand was complicated, though almost entirely frivolous: the testament of a woman some forty years less semianually. Still, it was an amusement she could afford if it pleased her, harmless enough, and he had use for the fee.

He drafted another line or two on the long yellow pad and broke the point of his pencil. Then the sound of a door opening and a man's voice.