

The Best American Short Stories 2016

The Best American Short Stories has been published every year since 1915. In this latest issue, the stories were selected from U.S. and Canadian magazines during 2015, and they reveal much about America today. Stories from these anthologies are sometimes required reading for high school and college students. What follows is my opinion of, and a quick overview of, the 20 stories in this year's collection.

The first story, *Apollo*, is from *The New Yorker* magazine and was written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In the story, he mentions that his ancestral home was in Abba, a city in Iran.

The next story, *Revalushan* by Mohammed Naseehu Ali, was first published in the magazine *Bomb*. The story takes place in Ghana a small country in Africa. The story concludes with, "... we retreated to our compounds and reverted to our go-to mantra in times of crisis: Insha Allah!"

Next is *Garments* by Tahmima Anam it is set in Bangladesh and concerns female garment workers.

Wonders of the Shore by Andrea Barrett actually takes place in America. The story revolves around two lesbians.

In *The Bears* by Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, the first person narrator claims to have had a miscarriage after a tryst with author and philosopher William James. About half way through the story, it is revealed that it is taking place in Italy.

My favorite in this grim collection is *The Great Silence* by Ted Chiang. The narrator of the story is a Puerto Rican parrot; finally, some humor and creativity, and it's the only humor and creativity in the book.

Next up is *The Flower* by Louise Erdrich, another story from *The New Yorker* magazine. It takes place in Ojibwe country, Canada, in the 1800's. The main character is a White man from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, who travels west and falls in love with an eleven-year-old Indian girl.

The Letician Age by Yalitza Ferreras starts out in the Dominican Republic and then the family moves to New York City. The main character Leticia, is interested in geology.

Remember these are supposedly the best *American* short stories.

For the God of Love, for the Love of God by Lauren Groff is set in France where two couples await the arrival of their half-black female friend. On the first page a woman has sex with her husband then stands before an open window exposing herself to a young boy. The title is the most interesting thing about the story.

The Suitcase by Meron Hadero takes place in one day in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where a young lady, Saba, has to decide what to take back to America.

Finally, on page 133, a story about Americans in America, but wait this is an over-the-top insult to America. Two brothers leave Gnaw Bone, Indiana, and drive around the country reading obituaries then going to the houses when everyone is at the funeral and stealing valuables from the homes. In the end, their father gets out of prison and the older brother goes home to kill his father. The story *Treasure State* by Smith Henderson should be avoided at all costs, it was probably chosen for publication because it makes White Americans look so bad.

Pat + Sam by Lisa Ko is a sad little tale. Sam Kwan leaves Hong Kong, comes to America, lists "engineering" as his major, and gets a full scholarship to a college in Nebraska. After school he goes to New York City, and meets Pat, a White American

lady. They hook-up, but it's not clear at the end when their sexual encounter is described whether or not they will stay together.

Cold Little Bird (*The New Yorker* magazine) by Ben Marcus is a collection of words but not really a story. About half way through I was thinking, "That's an awful lot of F words and M-F words for one little story" and then it was revealed that the family in the story are Jewish.

In *The Politics of the Quotidian* Caille Millner, a Black female, describes a female protagonist who has a twilight zone-like experience at university.

Bridge by Daniel J. O'Malley is about a boy who sees an elderly couple jump off a bridge. His parents don't believe him so in his child's mind he decides the couple jumped but then turned into birds and flew away. After going to college in America, the author, Mr. O'Malley, has returned to his home in Australia.

Another *New Yorker* magazine story, *The Prospectors* by Karen Russell is about two girls who go to parties and steal things. It is another of those twilight zone kind of stories where the girls go to a ski resort where everyone was killed in an avalanche, but they don't know it.

In *On This Side* by Yuko Sakata, the protagonist Toru comes home from work to find an old friend from school, Masato, waiting for him. However Masato who was a boy in school is now a girl. Masato now known as Saki moves in with Yuko who has been having an affair with a married woman but eventually Yuko asks Saki if she wants more of a relationship with him. The next day he comes home and she has left. This wholesome little tale takes place in Japan.

Gifted by Sharon Solwitz is about a married woman, Thea, who is having an affair with a younger man while her eleven year old son is undergoing chemotherapy for a rare form of cancer. The author's collection of short stories was a runner up for the National Jewish Book Award.

Author Hector Tobar is the son of Guatemalan immigrants, in the past he worked for the *Los Angeles Times*. In *Secret Stream* Nathan meets a “dark-skinned” young lady. Other females in this collection of stories are described as “dark-skinned” whatever that means; is she a blue-eyed blonde with a tan or an African American? This dark-skinned young lady is tracing an ancient stream through Los Angeles. The stream is sometimes underground, sometimes just a trickle, but it goes all the way to the ocean. Nathan and Sofia become friends but in the end he doesn’t keep their next date - for unknown reasons.

Williamsburg Bridge by John Edgar Wideman is written in a free form, jazz, the revolution will not be televised, kind of style. Mr. Wideman is a half black man who was for many years married to an attorney named Judith Ann Goldman. Their son was sentenced to life in prison for murdering a sixteen year old boy. The story rambles on about people committing suicide by jumping off the Williamsburg Bridge.

Thankfully that is the last of 20 depressing, self-indulgent, poorly-written stories from *The Best American Short Stories 2016*. God help us.