



Believers

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Charles Baxter's characters are buoyed by their beliefs, betrayed by their beliefs, wounded by their beliefs. They struggle to come to terms with contradictory feelings about their lovers, their fathers, or their friends. Some of the characters are emotionally disabled by their encounter with violence and evil; others discover they possess unimagined resources to resist what they believe is an unforgivable darkness.

Baxter is skillful at revealing the depths of human longing and affection as well as the attendant fears of insecurity and separation. His stories are often climaxed by emotional outbursts from characters who have been pushed beyond their psychological and moral limits. In many of these stories emotional and psychological violence loom before the characters like a nightmare vision. A young woman learns that her new lover may have battered his former lover. A lonely man finds a scrap of paper blown against him by the wind and reads a scrawled note, "The next building I plan to bomb." A middle-aged auto mechanic's routine is disrupted when he hears a man at a bar tell a story about murdering a young boy and burying his remains in a vacant lot. For these and other characters, the brutal ambiguity and uncertainty of such encounters compels them to examine their own moral values and to confront their inner selves in ways they had never imagined possible. In "Believers: A Novella" a Roman Catholic priest's faith is destroyed when he visits Germany in 1938 as the traveling companion of two American fascist sympathizers. His son, the story's narrator, tries desperately to understand how his father could have lost his faith, left the priesthood, and married the woman who would become his mother.

Sources for Further Study

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