



## Dwarf House

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“Dwarf House,” which first appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine, was included in the first collection of Beattie's short stories, *Distortions*, the following year. Because in this story James and his bride, both little people, are the only characters to have found happiness, Beattie seems to pose a question about the essentials for contentment. In contrast to James and his bride-to-be, MacDonald, the so-called normal brother, returns from a visit to the “dwarf house” (inhabited by one of his brothers, several other dwarves, and a giant) to report to his self-pitying mother not only that James refuses to return to the home of his previous misery but also that James is working, he is in love, and he plans to be married. When MacDonald telephones his own wife from his office with the usual “late-night meeting” excuse, after which he takes his secretary for a drink, he discovers that more things are askew. His secretary manages to smile only with the help of drugs, and she has recently had an abortion.

When the family assembles for James's wedding, the minister releases a bird from its cage to symbolize “the new freedom of marriage and the ascension of the spirit.” This is marvelously apt, for the bride's true radiance challenges all the “normal” characters—MacDonald, his wife, MacDonald and James's mother—to a painful awareness, but only if they can perceive it.

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