ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The Secret Names of Women
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Each story in Barret's collection of eight short stories is to be savored and, taken together, they constitute a rare and nourishing feast of secret insights about women.

Having the gift of voice, Barrett writes each story in the first-person-singular voice of a unique woman, allowing readers to get to know each fascinating character in the intimacy of her own thoughts.

In "Twentieth Century Design," when Elizabeth Doherty was fifteen her grandfather ran out on her Victorian Catholic grandmother. Elizabeth is "ready all the time to be bad but nobody gives me a chance. She chafes against her grandmother's ladylike restraint: Grandma sits up slim and straight, wearing a beige linen dress and an organdy apron. What a thing to wear when you're packing up because your life has fallen apart." Elizabeth sides with her grandfather and carves out a very different adulthood for herself.

In "Meet the Impersonators!" we're inside the head of the drummer in an all-girl band, listening to her conversations with fellow musicians and her inner musings on life, love and music. She is healing from a love affair: "What surprises me is the tenacity of love, its deep drag. I can't get rid of the delusion that it matters." There are two extraordinary women in "Hush Money": Annie O'Malley, gardener to the stars in Hollywood, and Wanita Donofrio, a recluse in the Northern California hills. The two women strike up a friendship when Annie's starlet client buys a piece of property next to Mrs. Donofrio's place. Soon they're confiding in each other, and we learn that Mrs. Donofrio once had an unusual acquaintance with Marilyn Monroe.

These engaging stories are ripe with insight into the workings of the female mind and spirit. The only story that falls flat is also the only story that's written in the third person. Each other story is a luscious taste of the world of women.