



In the Gathering Woods (Pitt Drue Heinz Lit Prize)

Adria Bernardi

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2000 Drue Heinz Literature Prize Winner

Selected by Frank Conroy

In the Gathering Woods contains a cast of characters who hail from the same Italian ancestors, but whose stories come at us unbounded by time and space. The book opens early in the twentieth century, with a narrator's boyhood recollections of gathering mushrooms with his grandfather—a narrator who seems still haunted by a terrifying local legend that tormented him as a boy. We skip backward to a young shepherd-artist in the Apennine mountains in the 1500s, who yearns to be discovered, as Giotto was. Later, a preverbal baby accumulates bits of the conversation carried on by adults at the table above her head; a neurologist from Chicago returns to the Apennines to deposit shards of glass at a grave.

Whether they speak in the lost dialect of an immigrant, of infancy, or of an adolescent girl's school lessons, these stories call up fragments of language in a struggle to understand and attempt to console through the act of reassembling. The language of these stories is both lyrical and comic, providing insight through the details of Bernardi's writing.

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