

A Healthy Interest in the Lives of Others

Teresa Carmody

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The eleven linked stories in Teresa Carmody's novel focus on women engaging in creative writing and processing their traumatic pasts.

The central character in the linked stories is Marie, who appears in all but one piece. Marie processes her sexual assault, tries to open herself to serious creative writing, and explores her newfound queer identity while recovering from an evangelical upbringing. In many stories, men have behaved badly; in response, women reckon with men's abusive behaviors, form communities with other women, and work to heal from their trauma.

Between each story, a short linked vignette, titled "Marie and Monette," explores the childhood relationship between the two neighbors—a connection variously platonic and romantic. Tender moments between the girls offer some relief from the emotional, intense content explored elsewhere. Also bookending each story is a full-page pencil sketch and a subtitle; for example, the story "Angela Writes Herself a Wife" depicts figures with lines drawn to empty boxes, as in a grade-school matching assignment, and includes the subtext or subtitle, "*a five paragraph essay that repeats three times.*" Angela works as an after-school tutor, takes care of her cat, and processes her feelings about her engagement while writing. Boundaries are smudged as Angela writes about herself, referring to herself as "the bride" and "Angela" while her fiancé is the "soon-to-be-husband." The repeating characters, pencil sketches, and metadescriptions that tag each story challenge the boundaries between what's real and imagined and between fiction and reportage; they offer paradoxical grounding and disorientation.

Observing the niche difficulties of being a writer, the shortfalls of writing communities, the challenges of lesbian dating, and nonlinear journeys in processing trauma, *A Healthy Interest in the Lives of Others* is a rich literary novel.

MIKE GOOD (January / February 2025)

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