



The Girl in the Flammable Skirt: Stories

By Aimee Bender

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The Girl in the Flammable Skirt: Stories By Aimee Bender

"A collection of wistful, witty stories." --Esquire

"Hilarious, deep and a little bit dirty." --Harper's Bazaar

A grief-stricken librarian decides to have sex with every man who enters her library. A half-mad, unbearably beautiful heiress follows a strange man home, seeking total sexual abandon: He only wants to watch game shows. A woman falls in love with a hunchback; when his deformity turns out to be a prosthesis, she leaves him. A wife whose husband has just returned from the war struggles with the heartrending question: Can she still love a man who has no lips?

Aimee Bender's stories portray a world twisted on its axis, a place of un convention that resembles nothing so much as real life, in all its grotesque, beautiful glory. From the first line of each tale she lets us know she is telling a story, but the moral is never quite what we expect. Bender's prose is glorious: musical and colloquial, inimitable and heartrending.

Here are stories of men and women whose lives are shaped--and sometimes twisted--by the power of extraordinary desires, erotic and otherwise. *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt* is the debut of a major American writer.

A 1998 *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. Selected by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of the best works of fiction of 1998.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In conventional fiction, war heroes return home minus an arm or a leg--or, to take Hemingway's worst-case scenario, the family jewels. In Aimee Bender's deeply unconventional collection, however, an even more suggestive body part goes AWOL: "Steve returned from the war without his lips." The army doctors have temporarily replaced them with a plastic disc, which impairs his speech. Luckily, this doesn't prevent him and his wife from engaging in some slightly surrealistic sexual maneuvers: "That night in bed, he grazed the disc over her raised nipples like a UFO and the plastic was cool on her skin. It felt like they were in college and toying with desk items as sexual objects."

That same combo--sex and off-kilter surrealism--provides Bender with her *modus operandi*. In "Call My Name," for example, a young heiress tails a stranger back to his apartment, gets her dress sliced off, and then consents to be trussed to a chair while he watches a TV documentary about Mozart. "Quiet Please" features a libidinous librarian who takes on all, uh, comers in the back room. Bender isn't, it should be said, simply a purveyor of French postcards. Her prose is exquisitely shaped, and its singsong rhythms suggest something out of a wised-up, whacked-out fairy tale. Indeed, if the Brothers Grimm had been a little more attuned to the pleasure principle, their fables might have boasted at least a family resemblance to Aimee Bender's. --*James Marcus*

From Publishers Weekly

The wise, highly original 16 stories in Bender's debut collection take place at the intersection of fairy tale and everyday life, of hilarity and heartbreak. From the book's first sentence ("My lover is experiencing reverse evolution"), it's clear that this world is far from ordinary. As the lover in the story ("The Rememberer") moves from ape to sea turtle to salamander, the reader moves from startled dislocation to delight. After this strong opening, what follows is equally good and equally surprising. The plots range from the unexpected to the fantastic: a woman gives birth to her own mother; in an effort to drive away grief, a bereaved librarian seduces man after man in the library's back room; a mermaid and an imp enjoy a high-school romance; an orphaned boy develops an uncanny talent for finding lost objects. As Bender explores a spectrum of human relationships, her perfectly pitched, shapely writing blurs the lines between prose and poetry. While full of funny moments, these tales are neither slight nor glib. They recognize that to be human is to be immensely fragile, and their characters are always unmistakably human. In "What You Left in the Ditch," a woman whose husband has returned from the war without lips tells her teenage lover, "The most unbearable thing I think by far... is hope," yet hope. That isolation and grief are temporary, that love exists, that the ugly can be made beautiful--is what she and all the stories' bruised and lonely characters insist on. Bender's is a unique and compassionate voice, and her debut is a string of jewels. First serial to *Granta*, *GQ* and *Story*; author tour.

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From Library Journal

The everyday people, objects and occurrences in this collection of short stories somehow acquire the bizarre, the grotesque, and the darkly satirical. A middle-aged woman gives birth to her own aged mother about the same time her husband's stomach disappears leaving a hole through his body. A beautiful heiress in an exotic evening gown follows a man home, hoping for blistering sex?he only wants to watch TV game shows. A woman comes home from work to find her lover in the process of reverse evolution--from ape to sea turtle to salamander. She takes him to the beach, releases him to the sea and waves goodbye. Loss and desire seem to fuel the events of these lyrical, oddly twisted stories. The unexpected is ever present with startling clarity in

Bender's first collection of provocative tales. Recommended. ?Joanna M. Burkhardt, Univ. of Rhode Island, Coll. of Continuing Ed. Lib., Watch Hill
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shawn Francis:

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Sandy Holiday:

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