



## Horse, Flower, Bird

*Kate Bernheimer , Rikki Ducornet (Illustrator)*

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"Each of these spare and elegant tales rings like a bell in your head. memorable, original, and not much like anything you've read."—Karen Joy Fowler

"A strange and enchanting book, written in crisp, winning sentences; each story begs to be read aloud and savored."—Aimee Bender

"*Horse, Flower, Bird* rests uneasily between the intersection of fantasy and reality, dreaming and wakefulness, and the sacred and profane. Like a series of beautiful but troubling dreams, this book will linger long in the memory. Kate Bernheimer is reinventing the fairy tale."—Peter Buck, R.E.M.

In Kate Bernheimer's familiar and spare—yet wondrous—world, an exotic dancer builds her own cage, a wife tends a secret basement menagerie, a fishmonger's daughter befriends a tulip bulb, and sisters explore cycles of love and violence by reenacting scenes from *Star Wars*.

Enthralling, subtle, and poetic, this collection takes readers back to the age-old pleasures of classic fairy tales and makes them new. Their haunting lessons are an evocative reminder that cracking open the door to the imagination is no mere child's play, that delight and tragedy lurk in every corner, and that we all "have the key to the library . . . only be careful what you read."

## Horse, Flower, Bird Details

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Author : Kate Bernheimer , Rikki Ducornet (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review *Horse, Flower, Bird* for online ebook

### Rand says

A charming and charmed diversion imbued with whimsy. This odd little book came to me by way of the author's work with (writing&editing) modernizations of fairy tales. It is thus fitting that this book reprints a piece from another anthology altogether.

The most delightfully enigmatic story was the final one, *Whitework*, which is said to be in part an homage to Poe's Oval Portrait. I had not recalled reading *Whitework* previously but know that I had, having devoured *My Mother She Killed Me My Father He Ate Me*, which *Whitework* appears in. The page layout of *Horse, Flower, Bird* forced me to read more slowly and thus absorb more of this little gem. (view spoiler) is meant as a sort of coda for Bernheimer, thus its placement as finale. (hide spoiler)]

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### Margaret says

I can't imagine this book could be any better than it is. That being said, it's not for everyone. The stories are strange, evocative fairy tales, written sparsely but beautifully, with minimal character development and yet each is a character vignette. I hope she writes more such fairy tales.

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### Tim Storm says

A lot shorter than I expected. Each paragraph of each of the 8 short stories in this collection has its own page. The effect is that the stories feel simultaneously shorter and longer than they actually are. But they are quick reads. The first couple didn't capture my imagination as much as stories 3, 4, and 5, which were effective allegories of social isolation. "A Doll's Tale" tells of a quirky little girl who develops close relationships with a doll and then with an imaginary friend, both of whom she loses. "A Petting Zoo Tale" tells of a lonely housewife who has a secret petting zoo in her basement. "A Cageling Tale" tells of another girl alienated from her family, who becomes attached to a caged bird, and then later in life, seeks to inhabit cages herself. These are spare tales, very much in keeping with a fairy tale-esque simplicity, but poignant nonetheless. The common thread is family dysfunction, but Bernheimer doesn't sensationalize the typical realist catastrophes of alcoholism and adultery and the like. Instead, she focuses on more mundane and subtle complications of family, that sort of love/hate relationship we come to have with those we spend a lot of time around. This paragraph from "A Cageling Tale" might be emblematic of the entire collection: "The girl grew to love the parakeet so much it was painful. Sometimes she imagined roasting its sweet body, putting the poor thing onto a stick over a fire--it was so small and delicate, it was not hard to think this" (101).

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### Kirsten says

I was fairly skeptical for the first 1/3, but there are a few stories in the middle that were wonderful and worth re-reading. I get the point of the format but I don't think it's worth it for most of them. Overall I found the collection interesting and I'm not against reading more of her work. Honestly anything consistently called

'strange' and 'spare' is worth the risk for me.

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### **Jamie says**

Some stories felt forced and random at times. A lot shorter than I thought it would be. Some pages just had one sentence and others just a paragraph.

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### **paper (^,..,^) vampire says**

Beautiful and strange, like poetry.

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### **Mehwish Mughal says**

Strange collection of tales. The stories that most talked to me:

A cageling Tale,

A Tulip's Tale,

A Star Wars Tale.

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### **Saskia says**

As much as Bernheimer is lauded as a reinventor of the fairytale, I think there's an important distinction between such tales and her stories. HORSE, FLOWER, BIRD is full of silence, sad little pauses rooted in air and earth, and they wrap up nicely. Traditional, older fairytales, on the other hand, keep rolling forward towards their twisted conclusions and morals, and end abruptly. In addition, Bernheimer's narrators and main characters are tangible people with complex thoughts; while they may be strange, they are not the meek actors in many old cautionary tales. In these ways Bernheimer brings fairytales into the 21st Century, with weird, modern flash fictions a tad too self-conscious to be called artful. What they are good at is making the reader stop and think deeply as they attempt to glean each narrative's larger meaning, and the hints of a stranger world within our own are delightful. They effectively transport the reader, which is what stories are supposed to do.

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

Perfect for the weird lady from a screwed-up and unusual childhood—and who has a penchant for flights of fancy—in your life! I personally loved this one, which is, I can assure you, quite telling.

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### **Amy says**

The Brothers Grimm cornered the market on fairy tales, and the original versions of them were often dark...far more frightening than the sanitized versions found in modern children's books. This collection of short stories by Kate Bernheimer entitled *Horse, Flower, Bird* is a dark collection of tales as well...not suitable for children, because under the seemingly simple stories lies a violent understory. The combination is disconcerting, and makes you wonder how the elements of fear and innocence could be combined so artfully.

I can't think of any short stories that are like this...the images create an almost instantaneous shot of pain, like a paper cut, when you grasp the author's meaning. For example, in "A Cuckoo Tale", a little girl speaks innocently of her feelings of guilt and anxiety (she didn't call it that) in a religious sense, so different from her Catholic friend. "There was no talk of heaven or hell in the girl's household. It was all about pogroms and rape." While she tries to live a child's life, visions of Jews herded into ovens fill her too-young imagination. She wonders why no one helped Anne Frank, who she calls "the girl who kept the diary."

In "A Doll's Tale", a little girl receives a beautiful doll as a gift...a doll far prettier than she. She didn't like it, and so "confused by this feeling-for Astrid was a kind and gentle being-her ambivalence became a kind of devotion." Her true feelings are revealed when she dumps it down a laundry chute. However, the loss of it soon leaves her lonely, and she invents an invisible-friend. There's no joy there, as the 'friend' suddenly disappears. A painfully memorable picture is created when her and her father drive around, looking for the beloved invisible friend:

"This second loss proved too much for her, really. Doll-less, invisible friend-less, finally more comfortable in fear than in gladness, Astrid began to live in her head...To outsiders, this...lent her a remarkably pleasing air, since she never had reason to interrupt anyone's talking."

?? Even what promises to be an amusing story of little girls playing Jedi's from Star Wars takes a darker turn, when their imagination, fed by the careless conversations of adults, suddenly creates a world far more violent and ugly than the movie.

The stories, while diverse and mysterious, all contain a theme of the loss of innocence. And the source of such loss seems to be the a child's view of the world where an active imagination and lack of experience create troubling and sometimes dangerous visions. Sometimes the simplest words can create a landscape of horror.

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## **Stacy says**

Weird and random. I forced myself through this in an evening hoping one story would redeem the book. I usually love dark fairy tales or strange stories but these were just fragments that sometimes hinted at madness or violence. If it hadn't been so short I wouldn't have been able to finish it.

\*edited to 2 stars because a couple of the stories have been stuck in my head (and not unpleasantly) for the last few days but my general impression remains the same.

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## **Oriana says**

Found (but couldn't afford) this at a great indie bookshop, and I left empty-handed and sad. But then a few days later the book gods smiled on me, and I found a \$1 proof at the Strand!

And oh la, what a lovely little read.

I guess you'd call these fairy tales, although they could as easily be considered prose poems. Some topics: A lonely, stunted tulip bulb and the girl who kills her. A woman with a secret petting zoo in her basement. A woman who turns herself into a beautiful caged bird. A girl in secret love with a white shift and a cheesemonger.

Stories to read while listening to Joanna Newsom or Feist. Strange and beautiful. Haunting and elegant. Soft and sad.

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## **Jus says**

I found a copy of this in a thrift shop the other day and decided to get it, something I was surprised at considering I'd never heard of it or the author and I pretty much only buy books if I recognize the author or title or whatever. However, I was feeling adventurous and it was \$1.50, so as the kids say these days, YOLO. Initially, I was attracted to the amazing art on the cover and the inside. Not to mention the set up is pretty unique. Its very minimalistic - a page can range from one sentence to a couple of paragraphs. Therefore, I knew it would be quick and wouldn't get myself into anything too serious. Obviously, it was a quick read, a couple of hours. However, that's not indicative of the content for it was pretty intense. There are 8 stories, all very strange and all of which I enjoyed. They are just very peculiar stories, not something easily described. Maybe a good way to describe it is "Woah man, that was a trip." They are like little fairytales but very poetic. They are sort of chilling, after you read them you are left a little sad. It's delicately haunting and eerie. Like a modern day Grimm story.

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## **Claire says**

I was particularly enthralled by "A Doll's Tale," "A Garibaldi Tale," and "Whitework," my favorite.

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## **Katie says**

A lovely book to hold, almost square, but a slightly less lovely book to read. Here's the outline of each story: a lonely young female protagonist devises some sort of quirky friendship (human, imaginary doll, bird, petting zoo), which fails. She mentions briefly how scary men come at night, there's some intentionally-uncomfortable sexual detail, and something happens at the end (dies) to make her sad. I loved hearing the author read "Star Wars Sisters" a few years ago, and it's nice that these stories are so fairy-tale brief, but I didn't enjoy this nearly as much as I'd hoped. The moves seemed too easy, like it relies on our love of other fairy tales instead of crafting compelling new ones.

