

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Commentary On Two Years](#)

[Interviews](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Poetry](#)

["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)

[Writers' Craft Box](#)

[Writers' Contest!](#)

[Book Reviews](#)

[Exploration of Theme](#)

[Archives](#)

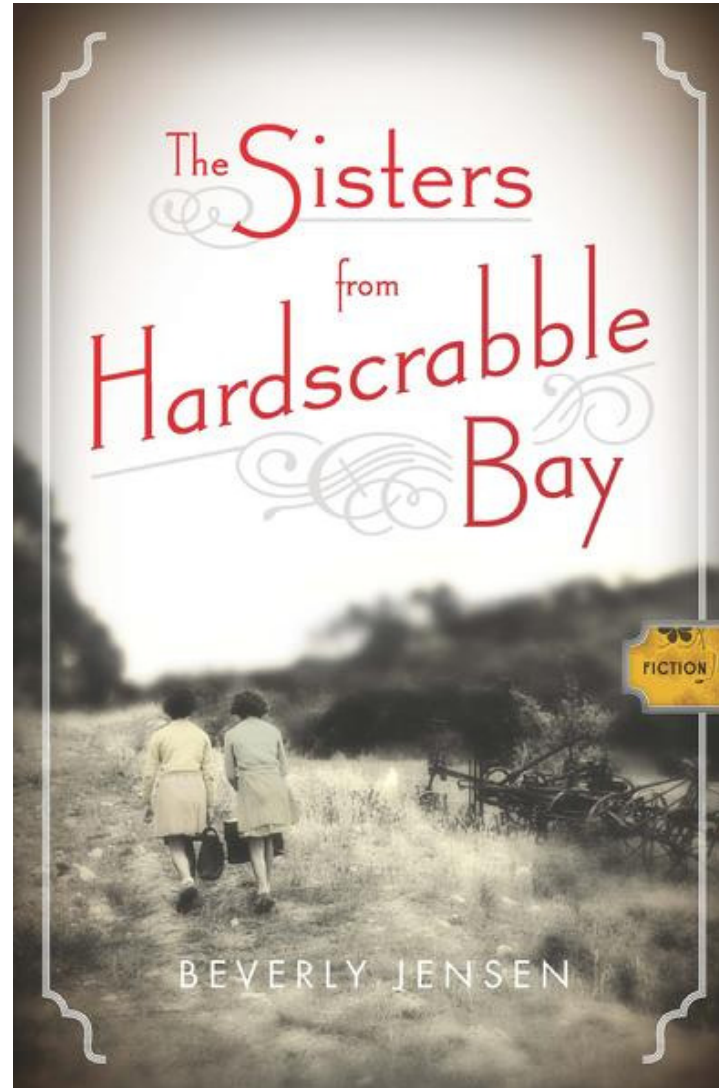
[Submission Guidelines](#)

[Feedback & Questions](#)

[Professional Services](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

***The Write Place At the Write
Time Book Review- Hot off the
Presses***



The Sisters From Hardscrabble Bay Cover Image

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review presents:
The Sisters From Hardscrabble Bay by Beverly Jensen**

Author bio: The author grew up in Westbrook, Maine and earned an MFA from Southern Methodist University. Beverly Jensen passed away from pancreatic cancer at age forty-nine. She is survived by her husband and two children.

For further information on this book, please click on the cover image~

REVIEW by Denise Bouchard~

If the author's intention was to write stories of deep, abiding love and loyalty, of family then she succeeded in *Hardscrabble Bay* by bringing sisters, Avis and Idella to life.

When I was first given this book to review, I was prepared, after reading the first chapter, not to love it. As my readers know, I gravitate towards good food and picturesque settings, thus when reading of the cold, damp weather and an isolated stretch of rocky Canadian ground situated high above the misty waves paired with little to eat spare for salted herring from a barrel, potatoes and more potatoes I initially felt ill. To the author's credit, I could feel the cold and almost taste the bitter, salty fish. The young sisters, Avis and Idella, initially impressed me as crass, but through the evolution of the story and their experiences together, the crassness turned to humor which ultimately turned to a charm that worked for them both in their fictional lives and as characters living on the page (despite the references to 'merde' that were as overpoweringly frequent and noxious as they were described).

When I came to the second chapter, Pomme de Terre, I arrived at what the attitudes the locals held toward the native French. Finally, I thought, a description of a French girl, this should be interesting. "She was French. Elsie knew it. They had a different way about, the French, something about the walk, using their whole bodies, not just their legs." I loved that and I thought, yes, we are a bit Marilyn-esque. Then this is described in further detail later in the chapter. "Like a cow, coming in from the fields- weary, deliberate, ready to be milked and put in her stall. Poor dear." There was the screech from the Road-Runner cartoon sounding in my brain. Ironically, this would have made Avis and Idella topple backwards with giggles. I had to put aside my feelings of pride for my heritage as unfortunately, the distaste for the French runs throughout the book. Once I got past all of that, though, I found myself laughing and then developing caring and concern for the sisters throughout their often difficult lives.

The author's attention to detail and her word pictures as well as her keen

observation of human behavior is compelling:

"Uncle Sam and Uncle Guy had been teasing Idella about her fur coat ever since she got out of the car. Everyone had taken note of it and made little comments. You couldn't have anything really nice without people acting like you didn't deserve it, or had betrayed them, over putting on airs."

The book is filled with rich description such as:

"She was a short, squarish woman. She had a black suitcase with her, the same shape as she was, only smaller."

"Jessie sat the middle of Ethel's couch. Her two black canes were on either side of her short legs, and she leaned back against one of those afghans Ethel was always making, this one a checkered yellowy green and orange. Jessie sat, bursting the seams of her black dress, looking for all the world like a fat spider, dead center of her garish web."

The second description was of Idella's mother-in-law and anyone could recognize in this woman the kind of person we all know as she is described here:

"Away from you're watching, watching, always watching. Always saying a mean thing. Crazy old lady sitting on the porch all day watching."

And my favorite:

"There was a doll with a big crocheted skirt over the roll of toilet paper. That drove Eddy to distraction. He'd nearly be-headed it one time. Her going to all that trouble to make covers for things that didn't need covering pointed out the way that Ethel's intentions were good but the thought process behind them was apt to have holes in it."

The book is architecturally interesting. In part II, Idella leaves New Brunswick for Boston as she bravely sets out on her own and makes a life for herself in the States. Later, Idella and Avis look back which greatly enriches the book and allows us the reader to glimpse an entire life without becoming bored as one might with a generational tome. This was accomplished by the author through her method of composing a series of interrelated stories over the years based on tales told to her by her mother and aunt.

"Wake" was one of my favorite chapters. I found it both hilarious with the honored guest's casket gone missing and poignant as an entire town looks

back on their lives. "Wake" was published in the New England Review , chosen by Stephen King and Heidi Pitlor for The Best American Short Stories 2007 and nominated by Joyce Carol Oates for a Pushcart Prize.

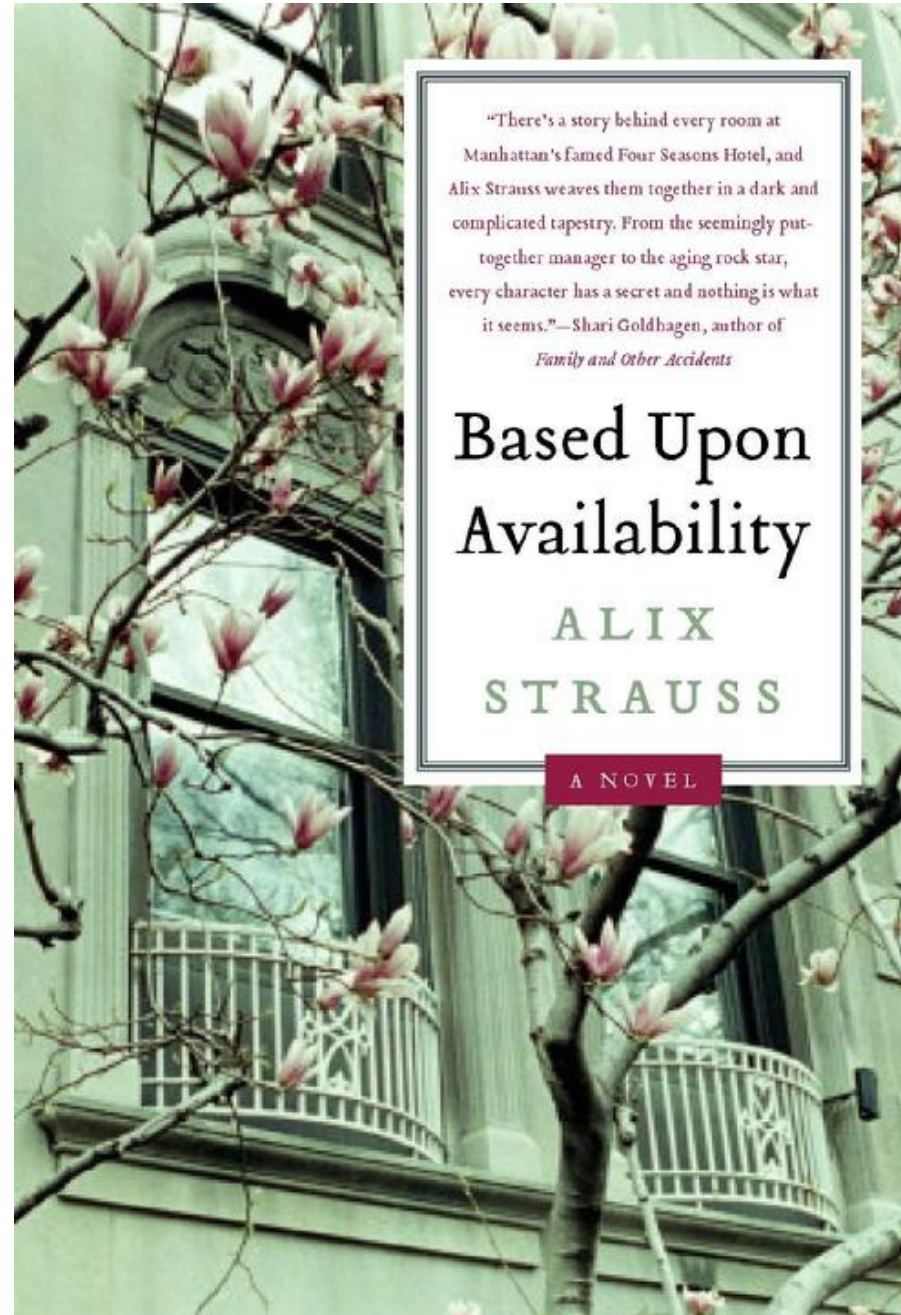
I also loved "The Hold Up" in which Idella's deep, intuitive intelligence and kindness perhaps changes the course of a life. And finally, "Three Sheets to the Wind" wraps up this novel beautifully as it fades out in the meaningful, warm memories of Idella's often oafish husband in his last days in a nursing home.

The sisters' small beginnings and little formal education later revealed a profound understanding of life, love and the need for humor. As expressed well by the author in a line from "The Wake": "They hunted and fished and lived off the land by their wits, which were more considerable and deep-rooted than their plantings, and heartier than an outsider might suspect."

The sisters managed to warm my heart after my hilariously rocky beginning and I know you'll love them too.

FEATURED EXCERPT~

<http://beverlyjensen.net/excerpt>



"There's a story behind every room at Manhattan's famed Four Seasons Hotel, and Alix Strauss weaves them together in a dark and complicated tapestry. From the seemingly put-together manager to the aging rock star, every character has a secret and nothing is what it seems."—Shari Goldhagen, author of *Family and Other Accidents*

Based Upon Availability

ALIX
STRAUSS

A NOVEL

Based Upon Availability Cover Image

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review presents:
Based Upon Availability by Alix Strauss**

Author Bio~ A media savvy social satirist, Alix has been a featured lifestyle and trend writer on national morning and talk shows including ABC, CBS, CNN, and most recently, The Today Show. Her articles, which have appeared in the New York Times, New York Post, Time Magazine, Marie Claire, Entertainment Weekly, Self, Esquire, and Departures (among others), cover a range of topics from trends in beauty, travel, and food to celebrity interviews. She is the author of the award winning short story collection, *The Joy of Funerals* (St. Martin's Press), and the editor of *Have I Got a Guy for You* (Adams Media), an anthology of mother-coordinated dating horror stories. Her latest book, *Death Becomes Them: Unearthing the Suicides of the Brilliant, the Famous, and the Notorious* was released in 2009 by Harper Collins and has been optioned as a television show by a well-known producer. *Based Upon Availability*, her second novel, was released in June of 2010 (Harper Collins).

The Joy of Funerals won the Ingram Award, and was named Best Debut Novel by The New York Resident. Alix's essays have been anthologized - most recently in *Sex, Drugs & Gefilte Fish... The Heeb Storytelling Collection*. Her short fiction has appeared in the *Primavera Literary Journal*, *Hampton Shorts Literary Journal*, *The Idaho Review*, *Quality Women's Fiction*, *The Blue Moon Café III*, and *A Kudzu Christmas*. Her short story, "Shrinking Away", won the David Dornstein Creative Writing Award. She is the recipient of several awards and fellowships from programs such as the Wesleyan Writers Conference, the Skidmore College Writer's Institute, the Sarah Lawrence Summer Program, and the Squaw Valley's Screenwriters' Summer Program.

Alix lectures extensively, having spoken at over 100 events and symposiums. She was chosen to speak at the National Jewish Book Festival, and is on the National Speakers Bureau for Israeli Bonds. In addition, she has spoken at numerous conferences and panels including: The Southern Festival of Books, The Northwest Bookfest, The New England's Writer's Conference, Wesleyan Writer's conference, The 92nd Street Y, NYU, Center For Communications, Mediabistro, Columbia University, among others. She hosted a monthly event at Makor called Word of Mouth Thursdays, featuring readings of personal essays, works-in-progress, and novel excerpts.

Alix received a degree in Educational Theater from NYU, and has taught Fiction, Creative Writing, Personal Essays, and Writing for Magazines for the past fifteen years.

REVIEW by Nicole M. Bouchard~

An artist in the novel bases his compilations of work on 'found' highly personal objects and assembles intimate portrayals of people's innermost fears and vices. It is in this way that *Based Upon Availability* is akin to an elegant hall of Dorian Grey-esque portraits representing the darkest aspects of the characters' inherent human wants, needs, flaws and vulnerabilities. It is truth without mercy, rawly portraying what terrifies them most within the neat frames of their outer lives. All this lurks beneath the surface of the expertly interwoven protagonists, behind the polished doors of apartments, chic designer clothes and posh hotel rooms at the Four Seasons.

Told from the perspectives of eight different women, the reader marvels at how their stories intercept in such an effortless, seamless manner. The commonality between them is the role that the Four Seasons Hotel in New York City plays within each of their lives; transcending the purpose of setting, the hotel becomes much more like a living, feeling character observing everything as it sits squarely in the center of the story's web. Morgan, the hotel's manager, drives much of the story through her interactions with the other characters whether directly or indirectly. Confidant and poised, she seems every bit the attractive young professional that she desires people to perceive her as. Stripped of the outer veneer, her instability threatens her core. Morgan harbors the death of her sister that occurred when she was a young child like a dark obsession that feeds her bitter outlook, overall discontent and the pervasive loneliness that manifests itself in both her personal and professional life. Trish, to whom Morgan looks for a sisterly bond, desperately yearns for familial connection and validation that neither her adopted parents or best friend who is now preoccupied with getting married can provide. Louise, past the prime of her rock star career, needs a fresh start to salvage her creative pursuits and fill the void that drugs and alcohol have filled in her glittering, fast-lane world. Robin, long-abused by her older sister, finally embraces her rage to expose the unspoken truths of the years in one destructive act. Charming, Southern-belle Franny yearns to be a true New Yorker, passionately in need of human acceptance and friendship in the city

that she would go to nearly any lengths to obtain it. Ellen, gentle, sweet and smart bears the brunt of the grief over her miscarriages so deeply that the wanting leads to illusions she cannot bear to disbelieve. Sheila, a sensitive soul with great depth of feeling falls in love with a man who tells her he is unhappily married, leading her to dream of a future together when in truth he is pathologically unfaithful to his wife, never intending to leave her. Finally, Anne, efficient and warm, is one of the most principle unsung heroes in the book as she battles the hellish anxiety that comes of obsessive compulsive disorder to try and maintain her job of accommodation and live her life despite the cruel circumstances that she encounters.

Each of the women come to crossroads where they can either succumb to their deepest pains, fears or they can find a way around them. With an incredible supporting cast of secondary characters such as Louise's publicist, Honor, who "wears success like the wash boys in the kitchen wear their cheap cologne-strong and powerful", explicit, well-rendered detail from the author and such a great deal of profound human psychology, the reader feels every step the characters take; you will share in the triumphs, grimace at the wrong turns. The degree to which you are made to feel for these characters isn't to be taken lightly. For the characters who ultimately come undone, typically in extreme ways with no turning back, there is an entire range of emotion felt. It is very nearly similar to a mild version of the stages of grieving; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The book is both disturbing and powerfully moving in this way. There is only one instance in the entire novel that a character's decline seems to not quite fit, like a single puzzle piece out of place. This situation arrives toward the end and involves Anne's character who is re-exposed to a horrific stimulus that she had previously walked away from unscathed, begging a question. It is here, particularly, that the reader yearns to understand more about her.

Although the complex character of Morgan takes precedence with the reason of being a link to the surrounding plot developments, you'll be left wishing for more chapters on each of the other fascinating women as well which is merely a testament to how intriguingly they were portrayed. Strauss has painted a masterpiece of a deep read about harsh reality and redemption that you're sure to be talking and thinking about long after the last page.

FEATURED EXCERPT~

Excerpt from BASED UPON AVAILABILITY – Alix Strauss

Morgan
Chapter 1: The Four Seasons Hotel

I watch the ladies parade into the bar of the Four Seasons hotel, their muffled, yet distinctive voices getting louder. They look like a pack of tourists following a guide, who, unfortunately, in this instance, is my mother, Rose Tierney.

"Morgan, we're here!" Acting as if she's Norma Desmond descending the staircase, my mother signals to me from across the room.

She's both breathtaking and distancing. A-list in the looks department, Wicked Witch in the nurturing arena. I want to run to her, open-armed, ready for her embrace, and I want to run away as reality sets in that she will never be the person I hoped she'd become.

Within seconds I'm accosted by the smell of several sweet fragrances making me think I've entered a stale perfumery. I glance at my mother's friends, their faces already embroidered in memory. They're as familiar to me as the conversations that take place in the hotel's lounge every Wednesday either before or after they've played bridge at the club next door. Somehow Midtown Manhattan's Four Seasons has become a halfway house for wayward Upper East Siders.

I smile like a good daughter and fall, rather slip, easily into the role I'm expected to play. I excel at this. My whole family does. Usually I can find a way to escape, a reason to be M.I.A. It's a large hotel with over 368 rooms. I could be anywhere: in a budget meeting, speaking with housekeeping, planning a corporate event, showing a room, dealing with a celebrity in crisis... the list of excuses for a general manager of a hotel is endless. But today I've been caught. Today I've been inducted, or abducted, into my mother's ritual tea hour.

The only way to tell my mother's friends apart is by their drink order; White or Red Wine, Cosmo, Martini, Gin & Tonic.

"The food is good here," White Wine says.

"Yes, the food is good here," agrees Martini.

"Marvelous," announces Cosmo.

"I just love it," my mother contributes, winking at me before taking a swig of watered-down scotch. "And having a child who runs the show doesn't hurt either."

"I tell Robert he can't take me anywhere else for my birthday, it's always here."

"I know," says Red Wine, slapping the top of the table. "I love high tea. It's absolutely charming."

"Best in New York."

"And there's so much food."

It's bad Mamet no matter how you look at it.

"Will you excuse me for a moment, I have to check tonight's reservations, The New York Times food editor is supposed to be having dinner here." This causes a collective 'Ohhhh' from the group, which fades as I head deeper into the hotel, walk towards the front desk area and slide over to the side that's momentarily not in use.

The turnover of our hotel is tremendous. According to the computers, every three minutes and 49 seconds someone is either checking in or out. There are three small boxes responsible for imprinting room assignments and security codes to the key cards. Upon checking out, the information is erased and a new number and code is given. When I select the room cards I never glance at the computer, let alone the guest's profile that automatically pops up on the screen when the room key is activated. I like to do this without help.

I close my eyes, run my fingers over the duplicate guest's keys. Like a deck of cards waiting to be fanned out by a magician, I remove one and stick it in the box. 1709 lights up in green. In the six years I've worked here, I've never

gotten this room, until today. I've been in 70% of the quarters, and am as familiar with each line as I am with my own apartment. I know which has the best layout, the grandest view, the largest bathroom, the nicest closets. That the corner rooms are 25 square feet larger than the regular ones. That the water pressure in suite 2510 will never be as powerful as the others, no matter how many times we try to fix it. That Oprah will only stay in the Presidential Suite and that the housekeeping once found a wad of cum on the wall in room 615.

I take the elevator up with an attractive Japanese couple who are decked out in Gucci. I bow my head as I exit, then utter goodbye in Japanese. They smile politely, return the bow as the closing doors disconnect us.

The floor is quiet, deserted. Not surprising since 11:40am isn't a heavily trafficked time. Three or four hours earlier and the hallway was active with men in crisp white shirts and expensive ties, newspapers tucked under their arms, cell phones already attached to their ears. The women dress in smart pantsuits or good-girl skirts and pull boxy, black suitcases on wheels. Then there are the young, pretty one's who wear jeans and v-neck sweaters. Sunglasses hide their faces, baseball hats cover their heads, underwear is tucked in a pocket of their coats or hidden safely away in their Prada handbags. Those that want to sleep-in never can because the slamming of doors pulled harshly by the fire-friendly hinges is endless. But now, all is quiet.

I knock on the door 1709 and wait for an answer. When another knock produces no response I slide my passkey easily, professionally, into the opening. I announce myself, hand on the door, body half in, half still in the hall. "Housekeeping," I say. Lie # one - okay, one fib on my dead sister's birthday.

Nothing.

I glide in and stand in the entranceway, close my eyes, tilt my head slightly to the right and catch the light aroma of...lily. A woman is staying here. The fragrance is mature, yet fresh.

I scan the area. Some people leave their room in a disgraceful mess. Liquor bottles and half-eaten \$8 candy bars or potato chip bags sit open, haphazardly placed wherever the guest felt like leaving them. Some abandon empty soda

cans overnight so that the sticky rims have left marks on the leather blotters or glass tables. Leftovers from dinner reside on the floor by the door, uncovered and picked over. Towels are discarded on the bathroom tile or tossed carelessly on the beds, the wetness seeping through the sheets. Not this woman. Though housekeeping hasn't been here yet, you can tell by the way she's left the room that she's respectfully tidy. Even her shopping bags from Bergdorf, Dior and Ferragamo are stacked neatly on the chair by the couch.

In the closet closest to the door is a stylish duffel bag, which is free of flight check-in tickets or stickers. It's too large to fit under the seat of an airplane, but small enough to carry without struggling, and would fit comfortably on a train or in the back of a car.

*I check the mini refrigerator and bar to see what's been consumed. Everything is untouched. I don't need to look at the price card, and like a game show contestant on an up-scale version of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Unhappy*, can announce the cost of each child-sized item. I close the bar door and inspect the desk area. The leather bound directory, blot board, notepad, stationary, in-room service listing and menu all seem undisturbed.*

I enter the bedroom, noticing that the pillows have been aligned and placed up against the headboard, the comforter and sheet pulled up and smoothed out.

The bathroom is clean, used towels folded neatly over the tub. On the vanity table sit three small LV bags. The first is filled with enough Chanel make-up to impress the sales people at Barneys. I apply some blush, Warm Mocha, with the enclosed brush then spray some of her Jessica McClintock perfume on my wrist.

Another bag holds a set of Chanel travel-size bottles: toner, face cleanser, eye cream, moisturizer and anti-aging serum. I save the best part for last. The third bag is filled with personal items, toothbrush, tooth-paste, eye drops, and bottle of pills. I love the sight of a punched out V or K. A few small tablets of lavender or yellow or white pills -- mood enhancers, elevators and downers, pain killers and relaxants -- all in similar, small, see-through rusty colored plastic bottles with white tops. Valley of the Dolls anyone? I read the recommended dose, then see if I know the name of the doctor or patient. Her medication selection is disappointing. There's only one type of pill inside, and the bottle of Xanax belongs to Ben Rosen. Her husband? Lover? Therapist who

she might be fucking in this very room? I reach for a glass, fill it with water, wash down one of Mr. Rosen's pills, which I'm hoping will help me relax, wipe the glass clean, and replace it in its original spot.

Back in the bedroom, I open another closet, several pairs of pants hang motionless next to a navy jacket. The first dresser drawer has a sweatshirt and matching pants, control top underwear and T-shirts. The next drawer reveals three silk shirts. I touch the cream colored one, then remove it from its resting spot. It smells like her perfume. I twirl in front of the mirror, the silk shirt held up to my chest, until I feel dizzy. I fall back onto on the bed, her shirt draped over me like a shadow.

I tally up the information: Chanel products are too mature for most women in their 30's. The shopping bags are from sophisticated, high-end neighborhood stores. The clothing has a mature feel, too. On the nightstand is this month's Town & Country and Vogue along with a Discman and several CDs. Anyone in their 20's or 30's would own an I-Pod or MP3 player. People who bring their own music selections are usually seasoned travelers who spend more time in hotels, airports and train stations than at the office. There's no laptop, or palm charger, so this might be a pleasure trip. She didn't fly here, and she's too chic and product oriented to live in a small rural place, so my guess is she lives in a large urban city like DC or Boston.

I close my eyes and listen: to the buzz of the florescent light above me, the low murmur from the TV escaping from the next room, the hum of the refrigerator, the annoying ticking of the clock on the desk, the distant zooming noise from the cars outside, the deep, hollow sound of my breathing as I wait for the Xanax to take effect.

Fifteen minutes later I fold the shirt, return it to the drawer, fix the bedspread and slip out unnoticed.

When I return to the table, my damp face has been patted dry, hair restyled, make-up reapplied.

"Morgan, what took so long?" my mother asks.

Sweat is running down my back. I'm slightly winded and a little disoriented. I take my seat. "I was following up on some reservations. We have a divisions dinner next week..."

"There must be a lot of them, you were gone for 25 minutes."

"Was I?" I say, head tilted to one side, an innocent expression on my face. "There was small crisis in the kitchen." Two lies, two lies on my dead sister's birthday, what's the harm?

My mother turns to Cosmo and Martini, "Who would have thought," she beams.

My mother extends her hand from across the table, rests it on mine. I stay still, remind myself not to pull away. "At 32, she's the youngest division's manager the hotel has ever had. Such responsibility."

"Not too shabby," Martini adds.

The women nod, their recently Botoxed eyebrows not arching, their collagen lips full and pressed into a closed smile.

"I barely see Lindsay. Sony works her like a dog," states Gin & Tonic. "You really have no idea. And James stays at the office sometimes till 10 or 11 at night, can you imagine?"

I look at my watch and calculate in my head how long it will take for people to remember my sister. How long until they switch subjects.

It only takes a few moments for the acknowledgement to happen, for memory to register. Red Wine shoots a look to Cosmo who, in turn, nudges Martini who is quick to add, "Anyway, it's really wonderful. Your mother is very proud."

Everyone nods as a check is placed close to me. My mother starts to reach for the leather billfold but I arrive at it first. "Mom, I got it."

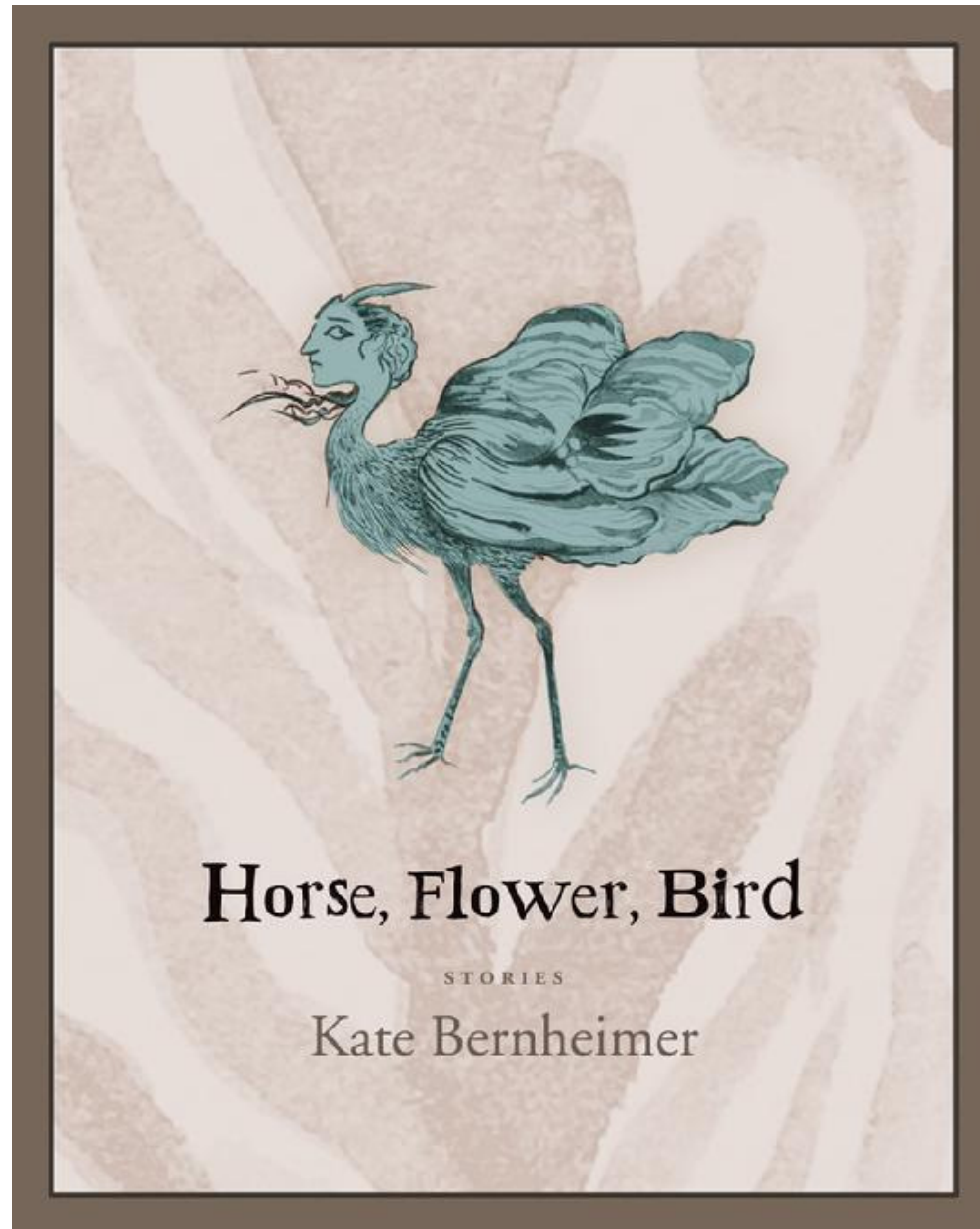
"Nonsense," the women say at once.

"Really, ladies. Please. My hotel, my pleasure."

"You'll be able to write it off?" Cosmo asks.

"Yes, we don't want you paying for it," White Wine adds. And with that, an outpour of wallets surface; Hermes and Prada and Gucci all make an appearance, their accoutrements as signature as their liquor choices. "Really, I'm happy to do it."

My mother is radiant. Now they won't pity her. Sure one of her daughters is dead, but the living one has clearly made up for the loss.



Horse, Flower, Bird Cover Image

**The Write Place At the Write Time Book Review presents:
Horse, Flower, Bird by Kate Bernheimer**

Author Bio~ Kate Bernheimer has published novels, stories, children's books, creative nonfiction, and essays on fairy tales, and has edited three influential fairy-tale anthologies.

Her trio of novels about three sisters—The Complete Tales of Ketzia Gold, The Complete Tales of Merry Gold, and the forthcoming The Complete Tales of Lucy Gold—work together as one volume, exploring themes of sadness, anger, and bliss (all with FC2). Her first children's book, *The Girl in The Castle inside The Museum* (Random House/Schwartz & Wade Books), was illustrated by Nicoletta Ceccoli and was named one of the Best Books of 2008 by Publishers Weekly. Forthcoming children's books include *The Lonely Book*, currently being illustrated by Chris Sheban, and *The Girl Who Wouldn't Brush Her Hair* (both Random House/Schwartz & Wade Books). She has published fiction and literary nonfiction in such journals as *Tin House*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Poetry International*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *The Massachusetts Review*.

As a fiction writer devoted to fairy tales, she has also undertaken to help preserve this literary tradition through essays and editorships. Her anthologies include *My Mother She Killed Me*, *My Father He Ate Me: Forty New Fairy Tales*, *Mirror, Mirror on The Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales*, and *Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales*. In 2005, she founded, and currently remains editor of, *Fairy Tale Review*, the leading literary journal dedicated to fairy tales as a contemporary art form. Ms. Bernheimer serves as an Associate Professor of English and Writer in Residence at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette.

REVIEW by Nicole M. Bouchard~

Within the shadowy corners of *Horse, Flower, Bird* author Kate Bernheimer lifts a candle to the darker aspects of feminism (including relationships between sisters, mothers, daughters and aunts) and religiosity. Question marks and ambiguity invade the conscious state through surreal imagery planted firmly in seemingly "real" circumstances. It is perhaps a device of the author to reinforce this ambiguity surrounding religion-associated guilt and the quest of 'woman' to define herself in voice and form that the stories, like dreams, have no beginnings or ends but rather unfurl gracefully into one another with common threads and light-

blurred distinctions.

Archetypically complex with Bernheimer's highly intelligent perceptions and vast expertise in the study of folklore and fairy tales, the book is written in a language so subtle and intricate, much like the white-on-white embroidered linen in the captivating tale of "Whitework", that it only belongs to the reader able to decipher its full meaning. Very much like a component of a fairy tale itself, the true essence of this magically imbued tome will evade many of the eyes attempting to pry open its secrets. They could find themselves enchanted by its surface allusions and illusions, however, the deeper meanings will make themselves available only to those equipped to master the quest. Most readers will likely fall into the middle, able to partake of some of the hidden magic as though the prose itself appears and disappears upon different pages depending on the reader's ability to perceive it. In this way, *Horse, Flower, Bird* is a journey not taken lightly; it seems to ask of the reader a substantial level of knowledge about its themes as the golden key to unlock the full extent of its message and deeper significance. Themes from *Sleeping Beauty* (the one hundred year sleep, coming of age, retreating from the outer world), *Snow White*, *Blood Red* (the inability or suppression against speech, self-expression in communication), *The Oval Portrait* by Edgar Allen Poe (draining of lifeforce, difficulty discerning art and life) as well as fragments from other lesser-known folklore appear and are largely integral to understanding the overall commentary/symbolism of the stories. Particularly in "A Cuckoo Tale" and "A Tulip's Tale" there seem to be running correlations to Judaism that sit just under the fairy tale context as foundations which may contain further meaning that readers outside of or unstudied of the faith might miss out on. In wanting to catch every subtlety, glean each point made behind the fantastical imagery (whether melancholy, beautiful or violent), the reader may find at least a portion of their thirst unsatiated. Even so, examining some of the sources that the tales derived measures of their themes from can be part of the journey. This also allows for the reader to take of the meanings what they will for themselves from the archetypal palette.

Bernheimer's story-telling voice is perfectly honed in the eloquent, paced tradition of classic folklore and paves the way to dreaming by triggering some latent instinct rooted in childhood that tells the reader to abandon the real world for a time to walk, unchaperoned, in a dark wood of imagination. This is evident in each of the tales, regardless of what perspective they are told from. "A Cageling Tale" is innovative in its modern context to delve into women's studies through a space in the 'gilded cage' and "Whitework" becomes an immediate favorite with its exploration and isolation of self amidst the setting

of a fairy tale cottage. A lingering notion of the cottage begins, "There were but few details for my enfeebled mind to record, as if the cottage had been merely scribbled into existence by a dreamer's hand."

The flow of themes works well even as the stories also function separately. It seems that the repression and oppression with quick mentions of dark male figures in woods and physical violation, act merely in this instance as extensions of what walls the female characters build to entrap themselves, forged by limited thinking and willful choice to please rather than seeing themselves as equal. This is gently conveyed in "A Petting Zoo Tale".

The book's design and layout coincide well with the content for flowing, ease-of-use that enhances the art form of the stories. Still, the water here is deep and not to be underestimated. It is perhaps its inconspicuous form that allows the enchantment to take hold, opening the door so that you can revisit the cottage repeatedly to search out new clues of self and society by candlelight.



[Featured Excerpt~ Horse, Flower, Bird](#)

Editorial Note~ By clicking on the book cover images, you can visit the authors' sites for more information.

© 2010 *The Write Place At the Write Time*
This on-line magazine and all the content contained therein is copyrighted.