



Cut Through the Bone

Ethel Rohan

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In this stripped-raw debut collection, Ethel Rohan's thirty stories swell with broken, incomplete people yearning to be whole. Through tight language and searing scenarios, Rohan brings to life a plethora of characters--exposed, vulnerable souls who are achingly human.

Cut Through the Bone Details

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Author : Ethel Rohan

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From Reader Review Cut Through the Bone for online ebook

Phoenixfalls says

Each of the stories in this collection is bright and sharp, honed and polished like a diamond. They are filled with telling details and unexpected shards of pain. I have my favorites ("Babies on the Shore") and those I really would not have minded missing ("On the Loose" and "Under the Scalpel"); but those emotional reactions are based not on an objective assessment but rather on which set of images appealed to me in the moment. I'm sure the ones I disliked are the favorites of other readers, and my favorites likely totally missed for others, because the quality is amazingly even (and high) across the entire collection of thirty stories. The only flaw, really, is that each of the stories hits a very similar note: desperate, broken people doing their best to fit themselves into a world that is not shaped for them. It made reading more than a couple stories at a time dreary, and the one day that I tried reading quite a few back to back that dreariness devolved into tedium. The collection needed a few more stories that ended on a hopeful note to leaven the pain. But as long as I remained disciplined and rationed the stories out day by day, they were both heartbreaking and impressive.

Maria says

This book is a collection of extremely short stories. I tend to feel dissatisfied reading short stories, so I didn't expect to enjoy this book. However I quickly realized that they were not so much stories with a plot, but rather glimpses into a moment in someone's life. And in reading this book, I generally felt satisfied with just a glimpse.

The stories are written with so few words that none are wasted. The characters aren't described in much detail, except for the details that are relevant. Because of that, I found myself identifying with characters who might normally be strange to me.

I generally liked this collection, but I did have two favorite stories. I reread them several times, and they continue to stay with me. Initially I wasn't sure why these two stood out for me. In every story there is an element of brokenness. I came to realize that in each of my favorites the broken character takes action to move forward and out of their pain. I like to find hope in the sadness.

I had the good fortune of meeting the author Ethel Rohan last night at a book club discussion and was very pleased that she chose to read us the story "Gone". It is a beautiful story about a woman who lost her breasts to cancer, who helps her neighbor whose husband is deployed to Iraq. Then she is helped in a way by a regular customer from the diner where she works. The woman's pain was very real, but so was the healing, or at least her longing for healing.

"The Bridge They Said Couldn't Be Built" is a touching tale about a woman who tries to stop a guy from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. Although she herself is tempted to jump, she gives it her all to try to stop him. I found it inspiring.

Dionisia says

Another goodreads author I discovered thanks to goodreads' first reads program. I was so excited about this giveaway and I'm happy to say it lived up to all my expectations. The book may be short but these stories can

cut deep. Stories of loneliness, addiction, grief, fear, regret, acceptance, love, anger, delusion, and loss are rendered beautifully here.

My favorites (in order of appearance)?

Make Over

On the Loose

Under the Scalpel

Found and Lost

Fish*

Next to the Gutter

Cut Through the Bone

*I find it hard to remember the last time I cried while reading a story or book. Maybe back when I read all those books as a kid that ended with the death of a beloved pet? It's occurred few and far between since then. And then I read "Fish." Mind you, this story is only about 2 pages long. Ethel Rohan's sparse prose tore at me deeply. I sat curled up on my bed, reading and unable to tear my eyes away from the page. Helpless to stop the tears from spilling out. What [expletive] talent.

Edward Rathke says

This is a rather impressive, albeit short, collection of shorts. It's powerful, emotional, full of longing, of suffering, of people not willing to give up or give in, of people who already have, of those just barely holding on. And yet, somehow she mixes in these magical stories as light brushes, slight touches, to alleviate some of the heaviness. She tosses the reader breaks from the bleeding of their hearts with flights of fancy and some real moments of humor. It's not necessarily an eclectic collection, but there's enough variety in here to keep us engaged, keep us excited about the next page, which is difficult with a collection, I think.

She has a powerful voice and, well, let's just say that the collection is titled appropriately. These stories can gut you, pull out your entrails, but they can also stitch you back up, though they'll leave the scar. And the scar, here, I think, is what matters.

Moving on, accepting, I think those feelings are well represented here. And much of it is the difficulty of family, of familial responsibility and devotion, of love's trials, and, maybe most importantly, the way love leaves us broken, withered, haunted.

And many of the stories hit hard in this way and so it seems that the collection would drag its feet after a while, but the order of the stories is some masterful design as well. Just when it feels like emotional exhaustion will set in, when the eyes begin to struggle with keeping on the page, the next one offers a refresher, showcasing the immense imagination behind these stories.

If I've anything that I want more from this collection, it's those surreal and magic stories that break up the collection, breathe life into it, and let the reader smile in between tragedies.

But, yes, a great collection.

Kristin says

I received my copy of "Cut through the Bone" in the Goodreads First Reads contest.

The book was a very short read, but extremely profound.

Ms. Rohan's work is simply amazing, the stories are short (2-4 pages) and yet she manages to pack so much power and emotion in each story...once I started I couldn't put the book down, I couldn't wait to see what the next story was going to be about and what I'll get to feel next.

The characters in this very short book were so human, it was shocking. Every character had a fatal flaw that the reader could easily relate to, a drunken father, a grieving family, a mastectomy patient...each unique character had a powerful impact on me as if I was with them at the time.

This book is a must read and I am honored to have received an autographed copy from Ms. Rohan.

Mel Bosworth says

**ARC (Advance Reading Copy) review by Mel Bosworth

An entire chocolate cake. A gallon of espresso. A liter of Jameson. For the average person, it's probably not wise to consume any of these things in one sitting, regardless of how tempting it might be. Ethel Rohan's debut collection *Cut Through The Bone* should be read with that same restraint, because overindulging yourself on the words therein will have you rolling around on the floor, your bed, they'll have you pacing the halls, holding your head in your hands, heartsick and longing. I should know, because I ate too much too quickly and it happened to me.

The stories in this collection—many only a few pages long—are extremely potent. Pungent. Deceptively rich. Like stepping into a puddle and being swallowed whole. Whoops. There goes your umbrella.

Rohan writes about loss, about being trapped, about desperation, delusion. And she does so with a hand so steady you might think she's a doctor slicing open a patient with a scalpel. And you'd be right, at least in part, because that's precisely what she's doing. Only you're not simply observing. You're the patient.

Visceral. The word visceral comes to mind. Rohan's writing is exactly that, and it's because she writes about things we all feel, that we're all familiar with: loss and absence. Rohan explores the profound effect these two things have on the characters in her stories as individuals, within the family dynamic, and sometimes as complete strangers.

The collection establishes the themes of loss and absence immediately with *More Than Gone*, a story of a widow remembering her husband as she carries a purple balloon:

"Home, she kicks off her shoes and ties the balloon to the kitchen table. She pulls off her sweater and drapes it across Albert's armchair, the chair such a comfort, such company, in the room. Her children want her to get rid of it. Never. She'd fall into the space it would leave behind."

What's interesting (and amazing) about this story is that the widow isn't simply mediating on the loss of her husband, but she's also mediating on his loss, the loss of his arm during the Korean War. It's an excellent

layer that adds to the connectedness of the characters here, whether present or not. Here, and throughout the collection, Rohan employs a technique reminiscent of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, where the dead provoke the actions of the living, thus making them—ironically—integral, present players within the narrative.

In *Makeover*, a woman wrestles with an internal entity struggling to break free, an entity that longs to sing and dance:

“She was riding the bus, imagining herself in a boat on a colorful lake, singing with the dragonflies, when she first felt the woman try to get out of her chest.”

This story touches upon the sometimes crushing responsibilities that come with having a family. It also acts as a reminder of the necessary sacrifices we have to make in life, sacrifices that bubble to the surface time and again to punch, kick. In just a few short pages, Rohan captures the desperation of a dream being drowned and the claustrophobia of the prison cells we sometimes make, perhaps unwittingly, of our lives.

However, the characters in *Cut Through The Bone* don't always suffer and scream alone, and in that we can find some sense of togetherness, a collective limping along.

In *Lifelike*, a woman who longs for children becomes obsessed with dolls, and as a result her marriage threatens to crumble. Only when her husband is finally forced to understand her needs does he begin to see those very things deficient within himself:

“Maybe she could sleep with us tonight?” she asked.

He looked into his wife's pale, startled face and saw a mix of fear and hope. He nodded. Her smile almost made his legs buckle.”

I found *Under the Scalpel* to be the most unsettling story of the collection, which truly says a lot considering this collection is teeming with unsettling stories. It was also one of the longer stories, thus leaving a very strong taste in my mouth. It follows the relationship of a mother and daughter—and the daughter's family—after the mother's plastic surgery, an act prompted by her husband having left her. But instead of a younger, smoother face, the surgery was horribly botched, thus leaving her more broken than before. The daughter, bound by love and obligation, takes her in, and the role-reversal becomes apparent:

“I led her back to the stairs. My lies echoed in the hall, came back to us. She felt so tiny inside my arm, fragile and childlike...”

This role-reversal is also echoed later in *The Trip*, a story about a daughter who takes her aging father on a trip to Galway. As the story progresses, we witness, as the daughter does, the terrifying state of her father, once a strong man but now threatening to be a hapless victim to time and dementia:

“I purchased the drinks, and waited. The creamy head on Dad's pint started to brown. I found him flat on his back in the men's bathroom, his head and torso under the sink, fixing a leaky pipe.”

This story is particularly heartbreaking because it invites us to laugh at times, even if uncomfortably.

However, there are moments of pure humor in this collection, and when they come they're very much appreciated. In *Fee Fi Fo Fum*, a woman's dentures are misplaced in a nursing home and she takes it upon herself to find a replacement set:

“She inserted the dentures, and tasted mist and baking soda and tobacco. She fought the rush of nausea. Recovered, she bared the dentures and tapped them together. They fit well enough. Her smile wasn't hers,

but it would do.”

While the overriding themes of this collection are loss and absence, and the characters shake, struggle, and slump, there are lightning moments of breaking free from the chains, of taking a stand, of acceptance—glimmers of true hope. In *Cracking Open*, a woman with an addiction to peanuts grows obese and begins decorating the house with peanut shells. When her husband threatens to leave her she breaks free from her misery and urges him to go, despite the fact that he finally witnesses her true beauty:

“In a rage, she jumped up and down. The house quaked and its contents teetered. Most of the peanut shells fell to the ground. She jumped and jumped, and sprang her skinny self out of her carcass.”

It’s an empowering story of slipping the noose of heavy thoughts and a dead marriage.

The stories in *Cut Through The Bone* are by no means pills to be taken lightly, but they are meant to be taken. Just don’t do what I did. Read this tight collection slowly and carefully. Savor it. Savor the black pills. Let them melt in your stomach. Let them move you. Let them inspire you. Let them remind you of what’s important in your life.

Ethel may write about loss and absence, but make no mistake, her book is very much present, and she’s a voice that’ll be around for a long, long time.

Steve says

First things first, a couple of these stories were published in the webjournal I edit, so I read *Cut Through The Bone* already a fan; weigh that relationship as you will.

These tend to be short, sharp shocks of story, and even those occurring over several days are compact and quick. Their characters are often trying to regain control against forces outside their influence, whether that’s illness or economics or aging or the kind of ennui that sets like frostbite. My favorites are those in which characters reach for that control in unexpected, even counterintuitive ways. Like “Reduced,” in which a married couple attend an art opening and the wife, stung by reminders of the more imaginative life she might have led, makes the knowingly mistaken decision to drink—more than that, the decision not to *stop* drinking—into a powerfully defiant, declarative act:

He rubbed his eyes with his fingers, weary, sad. “You promised.”

I swallowed and looked into my wine glass, pictured my parents inside. They sat facing each other with their knees pulled to their chests and heads tipped back, their mouths open, filling. I drained my glass and waved to the waiter.

Or “Scraps,” in which a woman meets with her ex-husband in order to finalize their separation, and drowns out unwanted feelings with a voice that’s not hers:

“How’s that teen intern you’re banging?” she asks. The word is foreign in her mouth, but satisfying.

"She's twenty," he says.

"Tell her I said, 'Happy Birthday.'"

But my favorite is "The Trip," one of the collection's longer stories, about a woman taking her aged father on a cliché Irish-American "homecoming" journey. The daughter aims, by taking charge of the details, to maintain control of the trip and of her father and of his no longer deniable decline. And the father, straining against his own weights, foils her efforts at every turn until his beautiful, tragic gesture at the end of the story (and you'll have to read it for yourself to find out what that is). It's a moment that makes so clear what underlies this whole set of stories: the moments we don't expect to matter can be the ones in which we most vigorously and vitally battle to become and remain ourselves.

Those unexpected moments are made so powerful, in fact, that the more "obvious" ones often pale in comparison. There are experiences we *know* define us—the loss of a parent or child, or facing our own terminal illness—which renders the stories hinging on them less surprising even though they're written every bit as well. It's just that they show us the world we already know we're living in, whereas the others—those surprising moments—show us a world we didn't yet realize we'd always been inhabitants of. And a world that, once Rohan leads us into it, we can't help but marvel at for as long as she lets us stay.

Andrew says

I slapped at his arms, his chest. He jumped away from me. We stared at each other, stunned, breathless. I felt I had holes in my head and face from the crush of his fingers. He dropped to his knees and cradled me tightly in his lap, hid his face in my shoulder. Inside the glass, my mother flailed, a tree in a storm, trying to get to us.

Like a knife turned on its side, shaving away tissue-thin portions of skin one after another until seeing red, the thirty tales in Ethel Rohan's debut short story collection *Cut Through the Bone* are self-contained, sometimes lyrical, often brutal slices of flash fiction, each ending with such a sharp intake of air one might feel lightheaded after reading too many at once.

In the past, flash fiction, as a form unto itself, is not something that I had given a great deal of thought to. The limits—500-1,000 words in most cases—seemed, to me, almost too restrictive. I've been writing a lot of short stories over the past two years, and when I first got wind of flash fiction I admit the idea of deliberately confining a narrative into such a tightly formed burst of words seemed, at the time, ludicrous. I was having a difficult enough time keeping myself within the parameters of a few thousand words; competent flash fiction seemed, thanks to a mental block I'd given myself, impossible. My thoughts on the subject, however, were clearly misguided, and like all things, strong work from the right hand will always light the way.

Flash fiction isn't about restrictions. It's about paring down, carving away adjectives and nouns, trimming modifiers and superfluous language until what's left is only the barest of essentials—a breathless hit from a pipe that will spin your world. That's what Ethel Rohan's collection, *Cut Through the Bone*, delivers.

In thirty stories spread over a sparse but fulfilling 112 pages, Rohan gives us minimalist narratives of mostly

nameless avatars: families falling apart; sons and mothers unable to communicate with one another; daughters and fathers adjusting to abandonment by the third peg in their once-was trio; a woman who, to the distress of her husband, latches on to an army of lifelike dolls to give her love to when there is no flesh and blood child to reciprocate; acceptance and rejection of the body as a thing to be cherished for what remains, or something to be scarred forever in an attempt to remake one's life and, at the same time, inspire the jealousy of others. From "Under the Scalpel":

Carrie's hand rushed to her mouth. John gaped. The others paled. I shot out of my chair. Mom stood in the doorway in her long white nightdress, ghostly and unsteady. Her wig was lopsided and her make-up had melted. A doll burning in a fire. She looked from the others' repulsed expressions to me, her lips two wiggling worms. She made small, wounded noises.

I hurried to her, my arms out. "Mommy. It's okay, Mommy."

I led her back to the stairs. My lies echoed in the hall, came back at us. She felt so tiny inside my arm, fragile and childlike, and yet the burden of her slithered up my spine, tightened around my throat.

Rohan understands the sparseness of language required in each of her stories, and she doesn't abuse that. While some are admittedly stronger than others—the entries "Lifelike", "Gone", and "Next to the Gutter" are the fiercest pieces in the collection—the thirty stories in *Cut Through the Bone* offer a wealth of emotion and control, guiding readers through a minefield of disturbingly fragmented lifelines.

As a short aside, this is the first product I've had the pleasure of reading from Seattle-based Dark Sky Books. The chapbook-style is perfect for flash fiction, and the book maintains a very clean sense of style and organization, not to mention some beautiful cover art by a Seattle artist named Siolo Thompson. I'm very curious to see more work from Dark Sky if this is the quality of their early offerings.

Marlene Marie says

this is one of those books that i seldom have the pleasure of reading, because so few of them exist in present times. i read it in a night, i told myself "one story" but the book never left my hand, the words never left my sight, because i just couldn't put it down till there were no more pages to turn. this, to me, was a book so amazing that it captivates you and leaves you haunted by it's words. words so strong that you can't forget them, and the way they touch your heart, your soul. the collected stories are all so amazing, every story has a message that shakes you to the core && each one does it in it's own way, and to win a book like this couldn't have been a more affecting event. it's well written, and well loved by me. to each it's own, but everyone should own this book.

Tara says

This became a very dog-eared copy. Normally I hate to do that to my books, but I just had to mark the many wonderful, original lines and passages I came across, such as:

"She checks the clock again and feels the heartbeat in her throat."

"I liked to hold the babies that didn't have visitors, to breathe in their freshness and sing them to smiles."

"My husband gestured at my wine-colored lips. I pictured the bloody hues there, trapped in the crevices."

And there are plenty more. What Rohan does best I think is write about those heartbreaking moments in life that we can all relate to: loss of a loved one, loss of one's self. I highly recommend it for flash fiction fans.

Matt says

I was pretty excited to come across this collection of thirty five short fiction pieces, because sometimes I think that's what my book would look like, and I was curious to see how Rohan met the challenge of not repeating herself. I think, in the end, I was expecting too much, because while it's true there's not a lot of repetition here in terms of characters or situations, all the stories cover roughly the same narrative terrain-- mostly realistic, traditional and domestic scenes here, often centered on female protagonists. There's nothing wrong with any of that, I just thought that more of the stories could've gone someplace else. It's true, I think, that short pieces often take liberties-- either with language or with narrative impossibilities, to become more like poems on the one hand, and more like fables or allegories on the other. I don't think that Rohan, based on the stories here at least, has a great interest in doing either, since with few exceptions, the writing is competent but never reaches beyond a solid middle style of workman-like prose, and the stories don't really break from the realist mode, don't reflect much on their status as stories, or do much beyond initiating, and ultimately, containing the narratives they present.

It's not a bad book, and I don't mean to suggest otherwise. But as a collection, it suffers from being a little samey, and especially given the range of work other writers are doing in the genre, this reads like a missed opportunity.

Jacque says

This is a book of short stories. All of the stories were interesting. They could be true stories. They are well written and a quick read. Of the thirty stories in the book I found four to be very interesting. These stories touched me more than the others. All the stories were good but these four were my very favorites. My favorites are: Lifelike; Gone; Under the Scalpel; and Vitals.

Lifelike was just a very interesting story. Now that I have seen some of those dolls that really do look like babies, I can see how a person could do this. I just found it very interesting and sad.

Gone gave me a feeling that was similar to how I felt right after my accident. I didn't lose my breasts but I feel that I lost a lot due to nerve damage in my face. I thought that this story had a real meaning for me and I really enjoyed it.

Under the Scalpel has a lot of the same feel as Gone for me. I wanted to hide right after my accident. I did not want anyone to see me. I was afraid of what others would think. Now that I am almost four years out from my accident, I don't care but at that time I was scared and didn't want anyone to see me.

Vitals is very interesting. I sometimes feel like the woman in the story. I love her words at the very end. "I'm here, though?" she whispered. "Tell me I'm here." I loved this. I do have that feeling sometimes. I just want to know that I am still here.

This is a great book and I really enjoyed it.

Richard Thomas says

This review was originally published at The Nervous Breakdown:

<http://www.thenervousbreakdown.com/rt...>

In this slim volume of very short stories, *Cut Through The Bone* (Dark Sky Books) Ethel Rohan presents a series of confrontations, putting us in the middle of those awkward little moments: when your mother stands in the living room her face scarred and disfigured, eyeballs floating in their sockets, rimmed with blood; when the divorce papers are dropped on the table, your husband's fingernails black with dirt, yellow raincoat wrapped tight around his frame; that moment of violence when you lash out at your only child, your wife gone, this the only flesh left to scream at, to hold, to hug and understand. This is not one long discourse, one epic tale that unfurls your heart, deboning you, leaving you dismembered. No, this is death by a thousand cuts, tiny slices that you hardly notice, here and there a thin ribbon of blood, a bite, a nip, hardly a sting at all, until suddenly this community of intruders has riddled your skin with wounds, a pool of blood gathered at your ankles, death revealed in your pale, translucent skin.

The first story in the collection sets the tone. In "More Than Gone" we get the story of a widow carrying home a purple balloon, remembering her husband, who has died:

"Home, she kicks off her shoes and ties the balloon to the kitchen table. She pulls off her sweater and drapes it across Albert's armchair, the chair such a comfort, such company, in the room. Her children want her to get rid of it. Never. She'd fall into the space it would leave behind."

Not only do we get a sense of the focus and tone that Rohan brings to her work, but we also get a hint at the magic, the surreal touches that she sprinkles throughout this collection. We are left with the touching sentiment of an old woman refusing to get rid of an armchair, this comfort and presence, but also the image of her falling into the space left by this potential absence, literally, and figuratively. It's the first haunting image of many to come.

In "Under the Scalpel" Rohan shows how a daughter and son-in-law deal with a recently divorced mother, her husband recently come out of the closet, off with his new boyfriend, leaving her no choice but to find a way to show that she isn't inept, isn't the only one that can move onward and upward. Her plastic surgery is a decision that turns out to be pure horror. But layered into this story that could easily have been a simple exercise in disfigurement and drama, staring at the strange, the damaged, instead turns into a story about the love and connection of a daughter, the honesty lying there amidst the range of emotions, the need to help and support, while also taking on the weight of this new development:

"I led her back to the stairs. My lies echoed in the hall, came back to us. She felt so tiny inside my arm, fragile and childlike, and yet the burden of her slithered up my spine, tightened around my throat."

That's the reality of it all. This is a huge inconvenience, disrupting her life. There is no way that this loving daughter can ignore her mother, at the same time filling up with sorrow and pain.

In one of the most haunting, and simultaneously heartbreaking stories of the collection, "Lifelike," we get the story of a woman so obsessed with having children that she starts buying lifelike dolls, soon filling her house with these babies, quitting her job, and threatening her marriage with the bizarre behavior she exhibits. Ultimately, in a gesture of love and solidarity, her husband responds:

“He eased the doll away from her, and resisted the urge to throw it across the room.

‘Maybe she could sleep with us tonight?’ she asked.

He looked into his wife’s pale, startled face and saw the mix of fear and hope. He nodded. Her smile almost made his legs buckle.

Throughout the night, he jerked awake, imagining he could hear crying. He checked first on his wife and then on the doll between them.”

This is certainly unsettling, but also, so vulnerable and generous.

Ethel Rohan has a gift for boiling down her prose to only the essential details, compressing her settings, emotions, and stories into a narrative that while only pages long, hints at so much more, the tip of the literary iceberg buried under the surface, threatening to cause more damage—unseen but still there, lurking, expanding while it ripples the surface, threatening to pull you under.

This is an early venture from the new publisher Dark Sky Books. Image isn’t everything, and we all know that we shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, but dammit if they aren’t doing things right. The touching work of Ethel Rohan, loss and hope intertwined, is a great place for them to start. Keep one eye on Dark Sky, and the other on Ethel Rohan. There is certain to be more compelling work from both of them.

Samuel Snoek-Brown says

I was THIS close to giving this five stars, and I'm not even really withholding that fifth star -- I'm just keeping one in reserve. Overall, this book is brilliant, an absolute tour de force of tiny fiction, an onslaught of stories so tight, so dense, that they bruise you when they hit you.

Well, most of them. There are, I have to say, a handful (just a handful, out of thirty) that feel a bit, well, not quite unfinished but perhaps undeveloped. I hate to sound like a graduate workshop here, but they read more like scenes rather than complete stories, and I've never been much of a fan for isolated scenes (even when I resort to writing them myself).

But those are the stories that read most like a prose poem, and I love those and have argued frequently that, when you really get right down to it, there isn't much difference between prose poetry and flash fiction. And I'm perfectly willing to concede to these stories I feel dissatisfied with might not be the problem -- the problem might be me, and maybe I just need to reread them.

And here's what makes this collection so damned amazing: I really, really WANT to reread these stories. All of them. Even the ones I didn't quite get. And I fully suspect those few stories might wind up making me a lot happier on a second or third reading.

So here's that fifth star, over here on the bookshelf right next to Rohan's book, both of them waiting for me to read this book again and again.

Emprise says

In Act I of *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is growing increasingly upset at his lack of accomplishment. At sixty years old, he is working on commission, he can't manage to pay his bills without borrowing money from his neighbor, and his son Biff is working odd jobs on ranches out West, directionless. Willy bemoans the current state of life to his wife, Linda. He has been working his entire life and it has all added up to nothing. Even when they finally pay off their house, there will be nobody to live in it, to which Linda replies, "Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way."

Few writers understand this truth better than Ethel Rohan in her collection of stories, **Cut Through the Bone**. In each story, Rohan explores characters that have spent their lives gathering husbands and lovers and children and limbs and then losing them one by one. Rohan explores each loss deftly, with a depth that hardly seems possible considering each story's concision. In the story "All There, Waiting," a husband and wife have lost a child, and the husband cannot understand the wife's desire to get on with their lives. As she does so well throughout the collection, Rohan transforms an innocuous detail into an emotional revelation for both the character and the reader. "He is craving cheese. String cheese. Something he can peel and peel. He does not want to eat the cheese. He wants to smear the cheese on the mural, over the boy, park, fish, and truck." Some characters seek solace from the emptiness—a grandmother draws a face on a balloon, a woman orders lifelike baby dolls to care for, another woman wears bright red lipstick and a wig to appease the woman in her chest—while others face the void head-on, like the narrator of "On the Loose," a pitch-perfect story that evokes a scene of random cruelty and terror...Check out the rest of the review on the site
