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Everything Is Flammable



Synopsis

"Bell's pen becomes a kind of laser, first illuminating the surface distractions of the world, then scorching them away to reveal a deeper reality that is almost too painful and too beautiful to bear." —Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*, *Are You My Mother?* In Gabrielle Bell's much anticipated graphic memoir, she returns from New York to her childhood town in rural Northern California after her mother's home is destroyed by a fire. Acknowledging her issues with anxiety, financial hardships, memories of a semi-feral childhood, and a tenuous relationship with her mother, Bell helps her mother put together a new home on top of the ashes. A powerful, sometimes uncomfortable, examination of a mother-daughter relationship and one's connection to place and sense of self. Spanning a single year, *Everything Is Flammable* unfolds with humor and brutal honesty. Bell's sharp, digressive style is inimitable. Gabrielle Bell's work has been selected for *Best American Comics* and the *Yale Anthology of Graphic Fiction*, and has been featured in *McSweeney's*, *the Believer*, *Bookforum*, and *Vice* among numerous other publications. Her story, "Cecil and Jordan In New York," was adapted into film by Michel Gondry. Bell's previous graphic novel, *The Voyeurs*, was named one of the best books of the year by *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *the Atlantic*. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The latest from one of the finest contemporary graphic artists. Few cartoonists can match Bell's (Truth Is Fragmentary: Travelogues & Diaries, 2014, etc.) eye for evocative details,

but the words of her narrative fill practically every available space, an outpouring from the artist who confesses, 'sometimes the anxiety creeps up and suddenly starts to strangle me.' If her life at the subsistence level of artistic renown seems a little dysfunctional, that of her mother seems even more so—especially after a fire destroyed her mother's home, leaving her living in a tent on the lawn, and Bell had to travel across the country to help her put her life back together. There's ambivalence about the visit from both sides: 'It's hard to be there in normal times, and I'm prone to cruelty under duress.' Bell also worries that she exploits her mother for material, which she does, of course, like she does everyone and everything else in her life. The trip to the Pacific Northwest introduced a whole range of challenges—packs of dogs and cats and bears—and a mission to get her mother a house built and stocked. The author also conducted a series of interviews with the characters who fill this volume, most of whom have murky motives and histories. This certainly includes her mother, with whom she discusses the troubled home life and the pregnancy that spawned the author: 'It's a paradox,' the author replies to her mother, after discussing the considered abortion. 'On the one hand, I wish you'd had access to a safe, legal abortion. On the other hand, I'm glad to exist!' Eventually, Bell's mother got her home and life back, and the artist returned to her own apartment—but then the cycle began again, as the title of the memoir underscores. A provocative, moving, and darkly funny book that seems almost worth the crises that it chronicles—Kirkus Reviews STARRED REVIEW; Bell writes and draws stories with deep humanity, and, impressively, that humanity—painful, awkward, and uncertain—is her own. [Everything is Flammable] spans a year and follows Bell as she travels to and from her mother's home in rural Northern California, navigating the guilt she feels as an absent daughter and the anxiety she feels in trying to care for her independent mother. Bell's self-awareness and observations never result in tidy epiphanies; the book's strips open out into one another, accumulating without resolution. She is also always funny, and her distinct blocky hatching style gives warmth to every panel. The ineffable quality is that she makes all this look easy—Nicole Rudick, The Paris Review; Gabrielle Bell is able to create, with simple art and storytelling, the complexities of what are supposed to be life's simple moments with hilarious honesty and—fair warning—delicious cringe—Patton Oswalt "Everything is Flammable is sometimes frightening, sometimes funny, sometimes incredibly sad, and always deeply engrossing. The center of Everything is Flammable is Bell's complicated relationship with her complicated mother—a person who lives a lot farther off the grid than most people's mothers. But there are many other characters in this book,

and we want to know about all of the them. Bell is an acute and compassionate observer of her fellow humans. —Roz Chast, author of Can We Talk About Something More Pleasant—No one but Gabrielle Bell can so quietly traverse a single raw nerve for 160 pages. Just brilliant. —Tom Hart, author of Rosalie Lightening: A Graphic Memoir

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I own several of her other books, and this one is also terrific. The story is all-too-true and certainly very serious, but it's beautifully-illustrated and very well-written.

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