



# Queen of the Black Black

*Megan Kelso*

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**The earliest stories by “Girllhero” Megan Kelso.**

Before her comics were serialized in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (“Watergate Sue,” 2007) or released by Fantagraphics Books (*Artichoke Tales*, 2010), Megan Kelso was a classic DIY cartoonist/publisher, who crafted and self-published her popular minicomic *Girllhero* from 1991 to 1996.

*Queen of the Black Black*, which collects these early *Girllhero* strips (as well as a few from other sources) and was originally published in a limited edition twelve years ago (now long out of print), provides an engrossing chronicle of an ambitious young cartoonist carefully developing her own unique style and approach.

In this volume, Kelso scrutinizes bicycle messengers, venereal diseases, infidelity, unwanted pregnancies, temporary work assignments, family reunions, and classroom daydreams in subtle and unexpected manners, setting herself technical challenges such as depicting music in comics (the virtuoso “The Daddy Mask,” with its sensuous gray swirls of sound on the page), integrating lettering into artwork in creative ways, and generally working her way toward what would become her mature style.

The title story, “Queen of the Black Black,” rendered in lush gray tones, explores the fraught relationship between the aging, demanding queen of a fairy-tale realm and a hornblower whom she takes under her wing.

There is even a vintage “Artichoke Tale,” predating Kelso’s recently released graphic novel by a decade and a half. (“I am planning to do a whole book of artichoke tales in the future,” she wrote presciently in her original story notes.)

*Queen of the Black Black* shows the first flowering (or sprouting) of a major cartooning talent, and its return to print (fully redesigned by the author) is welcome news for the many readers delighted by Kelso’s subsequent graphic novels. 160 pages of black-and-white comics

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