

Spring 2004



The Sunnerset Review

# The Summerset Review

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# The Summerset Review

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## Editors' Notes

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The Gotham Book Mart (and other notes)

"Whatever happened to Coliseum Books?" This is what I asked the idle teller at Fleet Bank, on the corner of 57th and Broadway, after having not worked in Manhattan the last two years. "As you can see," she answered, filing her nails, "it's now a bank. I believe they moved closer to 5th." And right she was, I learned, after looking them up in the Yellow Pages.

So I went to their new location on 42nd Street and tried to find the wonderful literary magazine bookcase, a source of much inspiration for me several years ago. "We don't carry as many journals now," said the man at the information desk, pointing to the far wall. The manager came out a moment later, trying to console me. "Try Gotham Book Mart," he suggested. "47th between 5th and 6th."

Walking over there, I quickly scanned the block. This is the heart of New York's Diamond District. More jewelry stores here than you might see elsewhere in a lifetime. There's one on top of the next, and many have a staff member out on the street telling you what your girl wants for her birthday. That's all I saw. Window after window of precious metals and stones. I went back to the new and improved Coliseum.

"It's there, all right. Hang on, I'll look up the address." And after a short while I was once again between offers for a gold herringbone necklace and tennis bracelet. But at last, I spotted the book store sign and wondered into the shop.

I met Pynchon in the back room, a tan, fat cat that is extremely quiet and rarely moves. Named after the reclusive author, he seems to stand guard over the rows of literary materials, protecting them. Almost every journal I knew of I found in this back room, oddly occupying only the top row of waist-high bookcases. Many back issues and multiple copies were also on-hand.

Up closer to the register, I thought I'd be sure to see Updike's latest, just released. It was there, of course, three signed copies.

I'm not quite sure if The Gotham Book Mart is meant to be a best-kept secret among literary types or if it's been declared a historical landmark by a former mayor. It seems like the only little shop on the long Manhattan block that has nothing to do with jewelry. Was it transplanted here, or did millions of shining clusters grow around it? You could argue The Gotham Book Mart is the biggest gem on the block. - J Levens

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In happy news, we'd like to congratulate two writers whose short stories appearing in The Summerset Review have received recognition in storySouth's Million Writers Award

for best online fiction in 2003. Max Dunbar's story, "The Unrequited," which appeared in our Winter 2003 issue placed in the top ten, and Tony O'Brien's story, "The New Geometry for Girls," which appeared in our Fall 2003 issue made notable mention. Thanks also goes out to Jason Sanford, editor of storySouth for his work running and judging this.

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We start off our Spring 2004 issue with Paleolithic sculpture problems, fact and myth about the famous Venus of Willendorf. Gerard Marconi gives us the story of several marriages - a brother's and a sister's - using this as a background in his "The Venus of Wellfleet."

In Jordan Rosenfeld's "That, Not This," a woman wrestles with a decision about the right companion and father, a "quintessential dilemma of procreation," as the protagonist's friend says.

A childhood, told in the form of a list, is what Alan M. Danzis describes in "When I Was a Kid," a short short rendering of, among other things, that certain gap between a mother and a father.

High school students can be quite the characters, and we are reminded of this in Scott Carter's story, "Day One," involving a teacher who recently entered into the profession after changing careers.

We would like to thank, as usual, our contributors and all those who submitted work for consideration in this Spring issue.

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We will be present at the CLMP Book Fair in Soho in June. Stop by and visit us to receive your free The Summerset Review bookmark. Visit the [CLMP web site](#) for more information on this event when it is made known. Anyone in the New York area having a love of literature should really make an effort to attend; many quality literary magazines and staff members are on hand, and most issues are available for purchase at \$2 each. Bring a large backpack!

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Joseph Levens – Editor  
Amy Leigh Owen – Assistant Editor  
S. Malkah Cohen – Assistant Editor

The Summerset Review, a literary journal of contemporary short stories and essays, is released quarterly on Mar 15, June 15, Sept 15, and Dec 15.

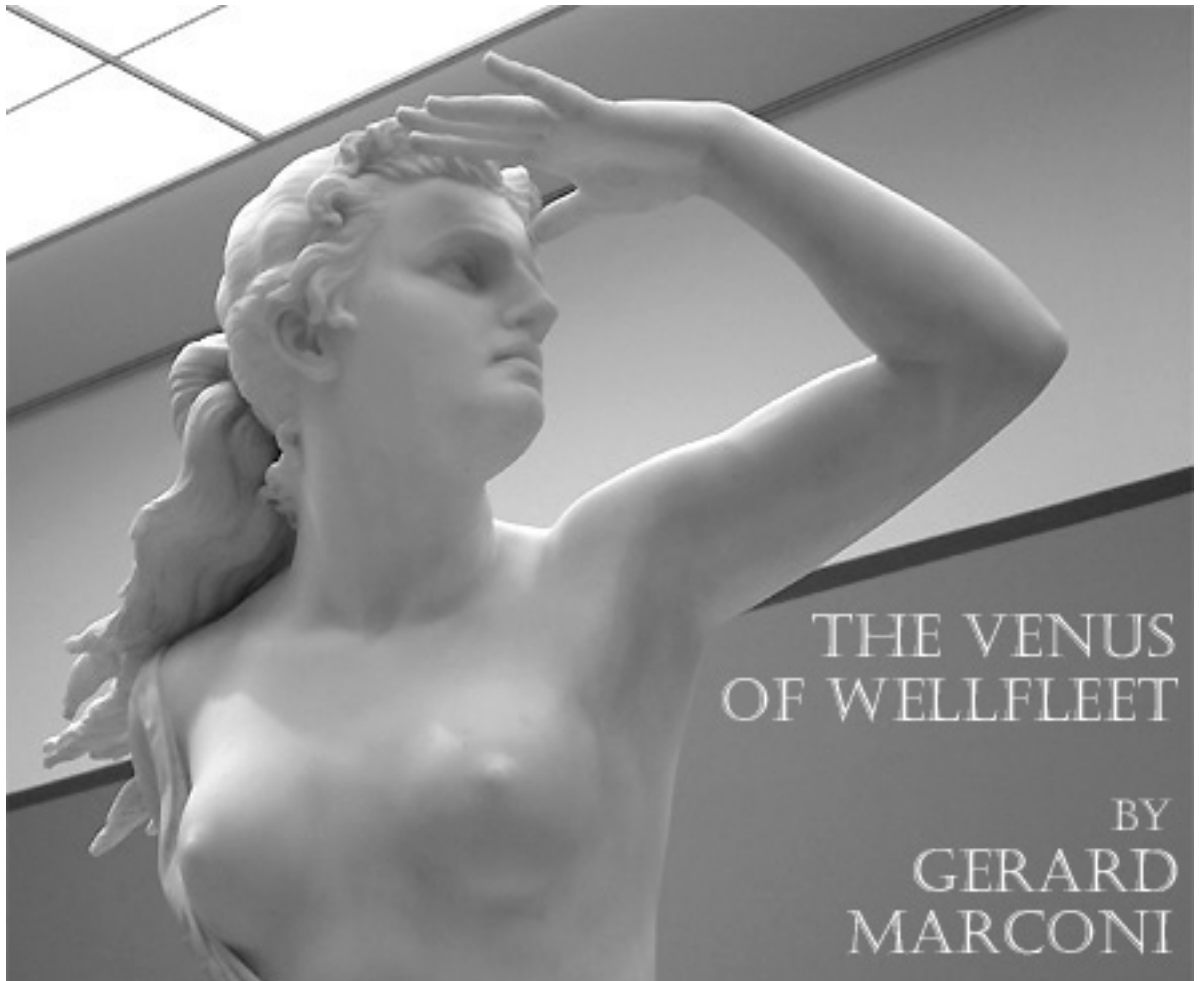
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The sleepless flight from Europe becomes a blur of images in my mind: the silvery Atlantic seen from 30,000 feet, an endless text on my laptop screen, the long descent into Boston, a line of weary travelers snaking their way through Customs. Then I emerge from the airport into a blast of August heat. Dog days of summer. Home at last after three months studying ancient fertility figures, well-rounded female nudes from 20,000 B.C. A summer's delight for any anthropologist. What was Paleolithic sex like? The real thing would have been better.

"Maybe it's the water," my wife says when we finally try.

"What do you mean," I ask.

"Maybe something in the water affected you while you were away. We can try again later."

So it goes for several days. "Do you still find me attractive?" she asks.

"Of course I do." But the real answer is much more complicated than that.

"Tell me about your research," she says while we pack for vacation.

"The usual. It was exciting at first, but then it got to be boring and frustrating. Now I'm stuck." Carol gives me that intense look of hers and I try to explain. "Something is still

missing. I keep coming back to who made them and why. Sometimes I try to imagine myself carving the figures and then burying them in a cave."

"That's not very scientific," she says.

"When all else fails, I use imagination."

"And?"

"Nothing. I have enough for a short paper. But even if they are authentic, they're not as important as the figure from Willendorf. That's the competition." I think about the journal articles from my laptop.

The so-called Venus of Willendorf is a miniature sculpture found in 1908 near the town of Willendorf, Austria. It measures a mere 4 3/8 inches high and is dated between 30,000 and 25,000 B.C. It is carved in such a way as to emphasize the reproductive aspects of the nude female figure. Because of this and its great age, the sculpture is considered to be an important icon of the Paleolithic era.

The next day we head for the shingled coast of Massachusetts. Driving down the interstate towards the Cape, we join an endless stream of traffic beneath a high blue sky. We pass small trendy cars in bright metallic colors and drab refrigerator trucks enroute to seafood shacks along the coast. On the oldies radio station, Frankie Avalon sings "Venus, goddess of love that you are." We move across a painted valley with white clouds floating above dark green foliage. The brilliant sky and its reflections below dissolve into an impressionist landscape.

My sister Pam and her husband Tom have been asked to share our vacation. Carol says that is only fair since they invited us to their place last summer. Closer to the Cape, the clouds get larger but still the sun shines brightly through. "Go away, clouds," Pam says from the back seat, as if a few puffy ones would block the sun from her pasty skin. We leave the interstate and follow narrow roads along the coast in search of Chatham, our destination for the day. Pam and Tom have learned a new word: upscale. As in this upscale restaurant and that upscale mall. On the way we hear about their neighbors, their spoiled children, and the advantage of leasing an upscale car. My grown daughter likes to call them yuppies, to which my wife replies, "What does that make us?"

Tom is an accountant, an avid day trader of stocks, and an aggressive hunter of profits. He is tall and muscular, with little or no body fat. The older he gets the leaner he seems to become. His nightly routine before bedtime consists of doing a hundred vigorous sit-ups and an equal number of knee-bends. Then he removes and cleans his contact lenses, flosses his teeth, and gargles loudly with mouthwash. It's like listening to a commercial for good personal hygiene. Before children, my sister was a dental hygienist, which is how they met in the first place. I used to think that Tom was rather bland and nondescript, but his true personality has emerged slowly over the years, morphing into something livelier but also with harder edges. He is quite different from the person my sister first married. Pam, on the other hand, has moved in opposite directions: her personality seems to have narrowed as her hips have broadened.

The statue depicts a corpulent woman with pendulous breasts, swollen abdomen, deep navel, wide hips, and solid thighs. The face, the arms, and the legs have been reduced to mere vestiges. For this reason, it is generally regarded as a fertility goddess or Mother Earth figure.

We finally reach Chatham and the narrow streets are clogged with cars. There is no parking near the beach, but for twenty dollars we find a space in the parking lot at the center of town. The well-tanned college kids in charge tell us that the nearby public restrooms can be used to change our clothes. After doing so, we head down the narrow path towards the ocean, passing between tall prickly shrubs and leaning into bushes so that people coming from the beach can get by. "Don't worry," Tom says, "it's not poison ivy."

Then we emerge from the shadows onto a vast and brilliant beach of a thousand bodies. I want to seek out some corner of privacy, but Pam insists on finding just the right spot from which to watch the breaking surf. Armed with our beach chairs and umbrellas, and stepping gingerly among the sunning crowd, we inch our way toward the sea. At last we stop among clusters of young people who turn to watch us set up

our things and then resume their chatter to the hip-hop beat from a radio. Nestled there among the blankets and nearly naked bodies, we lie for some time beneath the boiling sun. I listen to the surf and the passing powerboats, to the slap of paddleballs and the sound of crying children. I think about my research and the bulbous image of the Woman from Willendorf.

In recent scholarship the term Woman is substituted for the name Venus, a change that has created a shift in how she is perceived. Such demystification allows us to approach the figure on its own terms and affords a better chance of interpreting its true meaning.

Suddenly I hear some animated conversation in a foreign tongue, a girl telling her story to several friends in Spanish, punctuated every now and then by a single English sentence, "What is your name?" Every time they hear that phrase, the other two girls burst into laughter, as if it is the punch line to a joke. I turn to look at them from beneath my hat and sunglasses. The one telling the story is tall and rather pale. She has on a lavender two-piece swimsuit that is not very revealing. I try to guess her age and imagine what the story she is telling might be. After a while, I decide it is about some guy who tried to pick her up.

Tom nudges me with his elbow and nods toward the girl's two friends. The youngest one is darker than the other two and wears a wrist band made of leather on each hand. Her long black hair is neatly braided in concentric rows, and she sits low in her beach chair with the straps of her bikini top unfastened. When the three get up to head for the water, Tom is disappointed that she remembers to tie her top. As they run past us, her bikini clings tightly to her hips and is creased in the middle, so it is easy to imagine what lies beneath.

There are seven concentric layers of plaited hair wrapped around the figure's head in horizontal bands, and both wrists are decorated with bracelets or wrist bands. Her breasts are full and appear soft but the nipples are not shown. The genital area has been deliberately emphasized, with the labia of the vulva carefully detailed and made clearly visible.

They run into the ocean and hold their arms up high as if the water is too cold. They laugh and scream and bob among the cresting waves. After twenty minutes or so, they return to their blanket and the youngest one gets out a cell phone. She has an animated conversation with someone in Spanish and then rolls her eyes at the other two when she hangs up. She says something in English about a guy coming to meet them.

In the afternoon, Carol and I take our usual stroll along the beach. We pass a man throwing a leash to his dog in the waves. When the dog eagerly retrieves it, the man throws it out even farther. We pass little children sitting in the wet sand, their bottoms brown and gritty. Carol coos over a toddler being coaxed into the water by two adults, remembering our own daughter at that age. By now the clouds are streaky and stretched to membrane thinness. We walk hand in hand along the hard wet sand and let the swirling pools of receding waves coddle our feet. I think of other similar walks we have taken together over the years.

"I'm going to watch what I eat while we're on vacation and try to exercise every day," she says.

"Doesn't sound like much fun to me," I reply.

Then out of nowhere she says "Maybe you should see someone." It takes me a minute to realize that she is referring to our sex life.

"Like who, my doctor?"

"It wouldn't hurt," she says. "Maybe he can prescribe something." I don't respond but notice some stones half buried in the sand, worn round and smooth by the ocean. I look for the Venus of Willendorf but she is not there.

The statue is made of an oolitic limestone not found in the region, which means it was most likely carved elsewhere and brought to that location. It is not unlike the sacred pebbles collected and revered by many Stone Age societies. Her navel, which is the central point of the design, appears to be a natural cavity in the soft, rounded stone.

Later, I take a longer walk along the beach with Tom. He comments on a pair of women we pass who are holding hands. "Lesbians," he says under his breath. He prides himself on being politically incorrect. He refers to the foreign cab drivers in the city as towel heads. He says men are better than women at doing almost everything, especially sex. He sends me raunchy jokes on e-mail and shares investment advice. But we never, ever talk about personal matters. Now, in a moment of unexpected candor, he breaks this unspoken rule.

"Our marriage is falling apart," he says.

"What do you mean?" I ask, squinting into the sunlight to find the thin straight line where sky and water meet.

"Pam has lost interest in having sex." I don't know how to respond to this, or even if he expects me to, since we are treading on unfamiliar territory. "But that's O.K.," he says. "She's put on a lot of weight since her operation. Her hips have gotten broader and her breasts larger, and I don't find that very sexy." I think about his new addiction to physical fitness and wonder if he is substituting for sex or getting in shape for someone else.

"Maybe you should try seeing a counselor," I manage to say before we turn around. He makes no reply and we head back in silence, passing our own wet footprints pointed in the opposite direction.

When our wives leave the beach to change out of their bathing suits in the cramped restroom, Tom turns his attention to the three Spanish-speaking girls, who by now are combing their hair and getting ready to leave.

"See those three Hispanic chicks?" he says. "How old do you think they are?"

I wonder why he asks and then I realize how close they are to his own children's age. Another twenty-something girl comes running out of the surf and passes us. She stops at a nearby blanket and shakes her head to wring the water from her long blond hair, thrusting her breasts upward to the sky as she does so. She brushes her hair vigorously while talking to a female companion lying on the blanket. I see the broad hips from behind and guess that it must be her mother, or else the Venus of Willendorf at last.

"Man, we could do some serious girl watching here," Tom says. I think of his earlier remarks about my sister and then it's time for us to leave. As we climb back up the narrow shaded trail, a tanned and leathery woman passes us on her way down to the beach. Tom looks back and comments on her slender figure, her skin color, and her likely age. "Nice, but I think she's on the rag," he says and I try not to react to this.

At the time of its discovery, traces of a red ochre paint were detected on the surface of the figure's pudenda. This may have represented the menstrual blood of women as a life-giving agent. There is also evidence from the Paleolithic era that links menstrual blood with the blood of animals spilled by male hunters.

When we reach the restrooms, Carol and Pam are still inside and I see the three Hispanic girls in the parking lot. Tom fails to notice them since they have changed into their street clothes: brightly colored halter-tops with black shorts and high platform sandals. When our wives are ready, we decide to stroll through the center of town and look for something to eat. We pass the usual tourist shops and real estate offices, and Tom offers his opinion of overpriced waterfront properties. In front of a cottage set back from the street, I see a sign that says Clinical Psychology. Under the doctor's name is a list of his services: Personal Empowerment, Relational Trauma, Marriage Enrichment. In very small print at the bottom, I read the words Specializing in Eye Movement Desensitization and Thought Field Therapy.

While the others order ice cream from a frozen yogurt shop, I watch a pair of teenage lovers kissing in an alleyway. The boy has dyed blond hair and pierced eyebrows. His lean tanned body is naked to the waist and he has no hips. The girl's breasts are clearly outlined against the pale yellow shirt that clings to her slim figure. There is a silver chain around her ankle and she wears bright red shorts that are cut off just above her buttocks, which is where the boy is rubbing her. Their long passionate

kissing and slow caressing of exposed flesh are erotic in a voyeuristic kind of way. I linger over the sight of them and then turn to see an older woman staring at me. She has the same features and languid look as the girl, and for a moment I think perhaps it is her mother. Then a slight smile passes over her face and she turns back into the street.

At the far end of town there is a small park by the water, and we see a wedding party posing there for pictures. The women all have on lavender dresses and the men are in formal black tuxes. They stand in front of a white gazebo where the ceremony will apparently take place, while in the background small yachts bob up and down in the water, their ropes clanging against aluminum masts. By now the late afternoon sky is a clear brilliant blue with not a single cloud in sight. I see the Hispanic girls, who have also gravitated toward the park, perhaps to check out the wedding scene or the lavender dresses. When we cross the street to head back to our car, they disappear into the crowd, lost for good this time.

There are numerous interpretations concerning the significance of this sculpture. The facelessness of the figure lends it an anonymity which suggests that it was the depiction of a sex object rather than of a specific person.

On the way to our rented house farther up the Cape, we stop at a seafood shack to order fried clams and oysters. When the others go to pick up our order, Carol asks "How are you two getting along?"

"The usual," I shrug. "He's funny, but a week together is the limit."

"You need to talk to him. Your sister is a mess."

"My sister is always a mess," I say. "Besides, we never discuss personal matters."

"That is such a guy thing," she says. "You really need to do this. They are on the verge of getting a divorce." Before I can reply, Pam and Tom return with the food. We eat our meal in silence as the sun drops behind the trees. I enjoy the oysters, the salty smell of the ocean breeze, and the sound of other people's children teasing each other at a nearby picnic table.

The house at Wellfleet is not what we expected: it doesn't look as nice as the brochure and some of the appliances don't work. "Great!" says Pam. I call the real estate agent with a list of complaints and she promises to take care of them. Then we all unload our things from the car and head for the front porch to watch the full moon rising through the pine trees. Carol and I sit on the old fashioned swing. She snuggles next to me and senses the tension in my body.

"Did you bring your laptop?" she asks.

"No, I left it home. Why?"

"Good. Forget about the research. You really need to unwind." Then she leans her head on my shoulder and together we watch the moon climb higher. A shooting star flares briefly in the sky and Carol says, "Make a wish."

Due to its small size, the figure may simply have been used as a good luck charm carried by male hunters as a reminder of their female mate. The hair braided in seven concentric circles is also linked to the belief that seven was a magic number which brought good luck to the bearer.

"I'm being eaten up by mosquitoes," Pam finally says and goes inside alone. Shortly afterward Tom leaves too, and soon we hear them arguing about something in their bedroom. Carol shifts uncomfortably on the swing and gives me her intense look.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I wish we could be alone this week. Let's try again." She reaches out with her bare foot to the porch railing and with one graceful movement pushes the swing into motion. In the pale moonlight the blue veins of her ankle stand out against the milky white skin. I am reminded of the girl in the alley with the silver chain around her ankle.

After we unpack, Carol goes into the bathroom and runs the hot water for a bath. I look at the clothes she has laid out on the bed: several pairs of shorts and tops, a soft

linen dress, her worn leather sandals, and a few simple pieces of jewelry. I admire the earth colors she is so fond of. Then I open the door and go into the bathroom. I smell the sweet aroma of her bath gel and sit on the edge of the tub to rub the back of her neck. She smiles with pleasure and asks what else I would like to do. Her breasts are large and full, and when she slides farther down in the tub they seem even larger, like the fullness of her hips and buttocks. I am reminded of the time, years ago when we first started dating, when we tried having sex in a bathtub. She was slim then, these same breasts small and firm, and I would cup them in my hands during our lovemaking.

Given the figure's tiny size, it is not surprising that it fits comfortably into the palm of the hand. In this position it is transformed from a piece of sculpture into a remarkably sensuous object, its flesh seemingly soft and yielding to the touch.

Now, when she stands up to get out of the tub, Carol's skin is pink and soft, and I touch my tongue to her flesh. She pulls off my shorts and gently touches me with her warm moist fingers. We make love in the humid air of the small windowless room, and I do not imagine her any other way. I do not pretend to be seducing a younger woman, caressing a leaner body, or touching a stranger for the very first time.

Later, lying in the darkened bedroom, I think back over the day and wonder why I paid so much attention to the young Hispanic girls. I recall the psychologist's sign advertising Eye Movement Desensitization, and wonder what it meant. I listen to Carol breathing next to me and caress the soft, ample folds of her naked body. Half asleep, she mumbles something in response. I think of my past transgressions, both real and imagined, and wonder how she always seemed to know, even though I never told her.

There is the further possibility that the figure was carved not by a man but by a woman, and that the society which created it was matriarchal. Some scholars believe that the sculpture may have represented a Mother Earth goddess and that it was used in religious ceremonies associated with the worship of a supreme female deity.

The moonlight fills our bedroom. It pours through the windows and falls in perfect geometric shapes along the far wall. When it appears in the skylight above our bed, there is a strong attraction to its glowing fullness, perhaps as strong as the tides in the nearby ocean. Just for a moment I imagine myself being pulled from the bedroom toward the sea, soaring over the landscape and floating high above the dark water with whitecaps barely visible far below. It is a magical moment, as real or unreal as our perfect day at the beach. I think about my sister's likely divorce and the problems with the Paleolithic sculptures, and I decide that there is only one Venus of Willendorf. Everything else is an imitation or a fake.

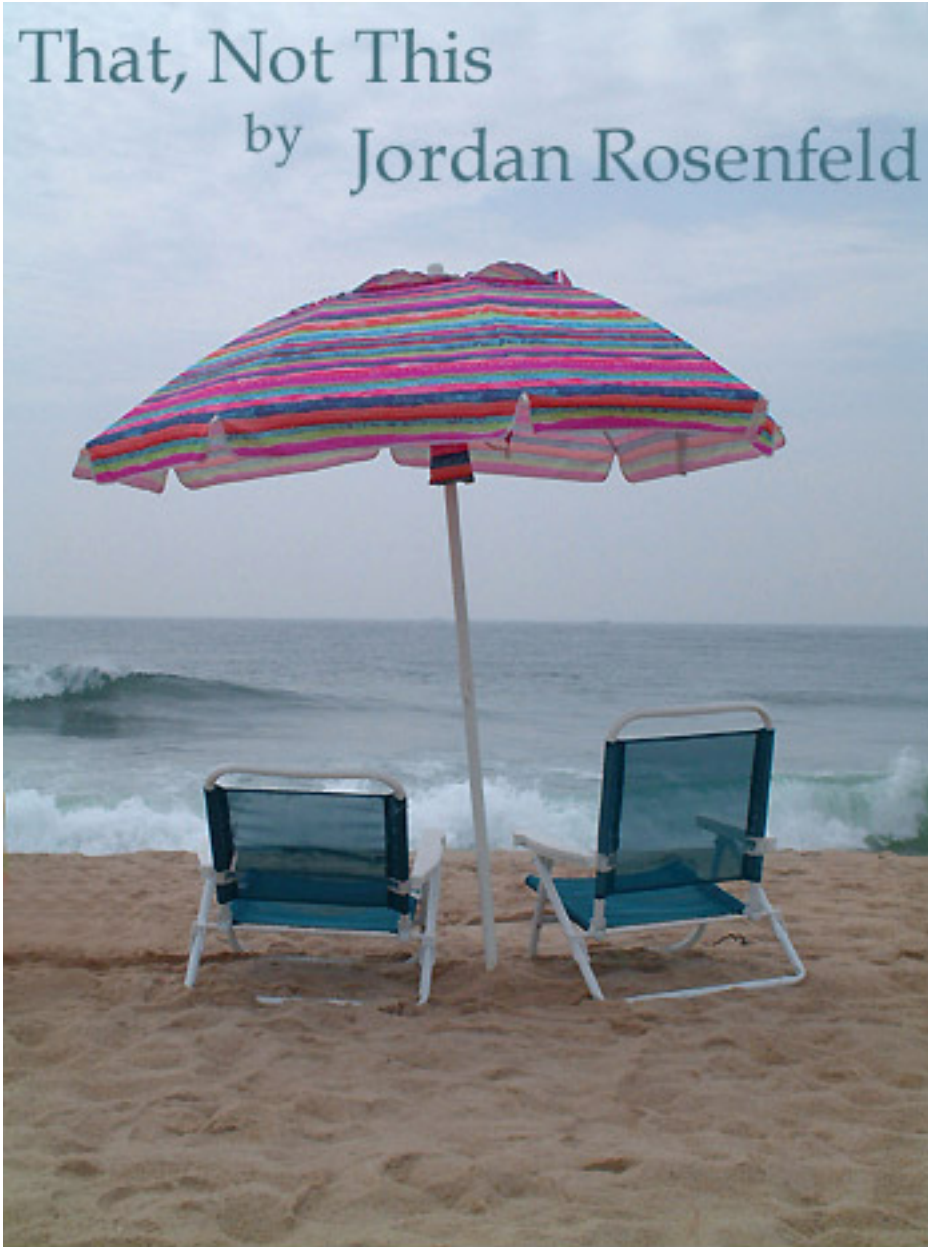


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# The Summerset Review

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That, Not This  
by Jordan Rosenfeld



It seemed natural to April to be drawn toward foods slightly fetal in quality: halves of tomatoes, primal and slimy; smooth, slightly gelatinous eggs with runny yolks; artichoke hearts emerging from the womb of their leaves. Her pregnancy itself, however, did not seem so terribly natural, despite all she'd been told of a woman's inborn urge and instinct for mothering. Her body had begun to take on the qualities of a temperamental teenage girl. It bloated, ached and drew her emotions into conspiratorial crescendos, blasting her like a small sailboat through hormone driven surf.

She probed inside a small tangelo for its seeds at breakfast. The pulp and juice of the tiny citrus seemed like little internal organs splayed open under the halogen light of a science class. For one anthropomorphic moment, she didn't want to eat it. That finger, her right index, was swollen along with its fellows full of ambient water, a side effect of gestation. Since reaching the plateau and "safety" of the second trimester just two weeks ago, she had been drawn to the insides of things with a fascination that made her feel conspicuous. Hal caught her yesterday peering up into the pipes under the bathroom sink, a large plastic U of piping at her side.

"Fixing a clog?" he joked.

April blushed and stuttered and left the sink undone like that without an explanation. She had just wanted to look inside, see what couldn't otherwise be seen, as if there might have been some parallel understanding to the creature (she couldn't quite see it as a person yet) growing inside her.

Hal weathered her moods and strange behavior quite tolerantly for a man who was not genetic contributor to her expected child. She had stopped having the nightmare too, in which Hal was a gorilla smothering all her baby gorillas and trying to seed her with one of his own.

With her hands smeared in tangelo juice, the phone rang — as it did much more often, she discovered, in the life of a pregnant woman. She wiped her fingers on the side of her pajama top and leapt to answer it.

"Hey girl," Bonnie's voice chirped.

"Bon-bon. It's Saturday, make me feel like a normal person again, O.K.? People act like I might hurt myself by lifting paper."

"County fair," Bonnie said.

"Oh." April tried to hide her lack of interest.

"I promised Ethan. You'd be good company for me, if you're feeling up to it."

"Well I can't really use nausea as an excuse."



Bonnie arrived twenty minutes later in "The Behemoth" as Hal referred to it, a vehicle so big and red that it made eyebrows rise even in SUV circles, according to Bonnie, who drove it because her husband insisted on the BMW for himself. Eight year-old Ethan, as red-headed and freckled as they came, sat in the backseat looking sullen.

Bonnie kissed April and attempted to open her door for her.

"Don't do that! I'm pregnant, not disabled."

"Sorry."

Bonnie walked back to her side and got in.

"Hey moppet," April said to Ethan, who didn't even crack a smile. "Who's got crumbs in his pants?" April teased.

"We're negotiating needs," Bonnie said to which Ethan thumped the back of her seat with a Nike-clad foot. "He believes he needs more time in front of the television, I believe I need a child who can form a complete sentence."



The fairground teemed with people, many of whom had managed to become sunburned before noon. The chaos of odors and the roar of rides made April feel overwhelmed, though she kept it to herself. Bonnie procured a handful of tickets for Ethan and set him off on The Zipper.

"I want a caramel apple," April declared, drawn by the prospect of something with seeds in its heart.

"Ugh," Bonnie clutched her stomach. "The last time I had one of those it didn't stay down."

They wandered past the booths full of cheap glasses in a crowded bay of other glassware; white, egg-like Ping Pong balls floated embryonic in the belly of ashtrays and bowls too small to be of much use.

"You want to try?" Bonnie pointed. The hawker smiled at the ladies.

"Ten balls for two dollars," he said.

"No thanks," Bonnie said, flipping her hair in an unconscious mode of flirtation. "We have more than enough balls in our lives."

The hawker grinned. "You can never have enough," he said.

The chemistry of strangers trading pheromones irritated April. There were days she loved Bonnie like a sister and days she wished she'd never met her.

April pushed her on.

"He was cute!" Bonnie protested.

"You're married," April reminded.

"We'll see how long that lasts," Bonnie replied, glancing up at The Zipper to locate her son, swirling in centrifugal motion.

"Don't let Ethan hear you say that. This is the stuff that scars children for life."

"No, the permanent damage comes from the name-calling that goes on in his presence."

"Is that why he watches so much television?"

"Probably."

They soon moved Ethan on to the Tilt O' Whirl, where he was piled into a cab containing three boys much bigger than him who looked pained to have him in their midst. Despite having defied gravity three ways to Sunday, Ethan didn't show the slightest trace of an upset stomach.

"He called, you know," Bonnie said, reaching for April's half-gnawed caramel apple despite her earlier grimaces.

"Don't eat the last of the caramel," April said.

"You don't want to talk about the call?"

"What's to say Bon? We made a deal. My autonomy for his disappearance."

"There's no such thing as no strings attached, you know."

April grabbed the apple from her friend's hand mid-bite. Bonnie narrowed her eyes.

"If this is your idea of an intervention, you can forget it," April said, purposely licking off the remains of the caramel. Behind them a caricature of a carnie, all greased hair and pock marked skin, beckoned to them with promise of stuffed zebras at his game.

"That ride makes me sick just to look at it," Bonnie said watching her son's blurred face whiz by. Then she fell silent or as close to it as possible inside the parabola of carnival noise. The nearest simulation of silence was the whoosh of the water gun filling up behind their heads where sunburned men won their girlfriends stuffed jungle animals.

"So what did he want?" April acquiesced.

"Just to know how you are."

"And how am I?"

"Fine, I guess. You seem fine. Hal seems fine. Everyone is peachy."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Look, I'm going to be an aunt to my best friend's baby and yet my own brother is out of the loop. It's just, it feels weird, you know? It feels..."

"Unnatural?"

"Well..."

"He didn't want it."

"And you did. The quintessential dilemma of procreation," said Bonnie with a sigh.

"How'd you feel when you got pregnant with Ethan?"

"Queasy."

"Ha-ha. I'm serious."

"Ecstatic, honestly. I was a walking ovary basically just waiting to pop out an egg."

"Did you feel ecstatic right away?"

Bonnie bit her fingernail and glanced back at the cute ping pong ball hawker who waved.

"Yeah, from the second that other pink line appeared."

"I'm still hungry," April said, shoving off mid conversation toward the speckled yellow and red stand that sold cornballs. Bonnie, distracted by eye contact with the cute guy, finally chased after her.

"You're avoiding something," she said when she caught up. Mouth full of popcorn ball, April shrugged.

"You were excited when you found out, right? You would have been more excited if Cole had been too... right? "

"Probably, but..."

Bonnie pressed on, as if afraid to hear what April might really have to say.

"But Hal's a good guy and you love him, I know."

"No, it's not just that."

"And he is a good guy to father someone else's baby." Bonnie sounded bitter.

"Hal is... he pays attention, he wants to be..."

"I mean, it's not something just any guy would do... they always want to plant their own seed..."

The gorilla nightmare rose like acid reflux in April.

"Stop it, Bonnie. Enough. "

Bonnie glanced over April's shoulder at the ping pong guy. April followed her gaze.

"If you get his phone number I'm going to kill you." April said.

"Who should leave whom alone?"

"Ethan's Tilt O' Whirled out," April said pointing. Bonnie shot her a glance full of irritation and they trudged off to rescue the teetering boy.

Another five rides later and a chatty conversation with ping pong guy that fortunately did not lead to potential extramarital concerns, April was done with her day at the carnival.

"Can we just look at the animals before we go?" Ethan begged his mother. Bonnie pleaded through eye contact with April. The look said, he doesn't ask me for anything anymore... just give me this.

So they meandered through manure scented rows of pigs and cows and proud handlers. Ethan ran ahead, kicking up sawdust. April tucked the top of her shirt over her nose and mouth in case any wayward particles should filter in. Ethan stopped, transfixed in front of one stall. The women lingered behind so they could continue their conversation.

"Apey... can I ask you something?"

"You just did," April said, wishing she had a soda to wash the heat out of her throat.

"Ha-ha. Now I'm serious."

"You'll ask even if I say no; why do you even bother?"

"Do you really want this baby? I mean, you're not having second thoughts are you?"

April became suddenly fascinated with the gargantuan pig in the stall at their feet.

"It's nebulous right now. It's not a person or anything, just kind of an idea; an idea that makes me feel like shit every morning and makes a lot of people feel sorry for me. Come to think of it, it's a little bit like being disabled."

"What kind of an answer is that?"

"I guess not the one you were hoping for."

"I just... I have a genetic investment in this, you know?"

"Yeah, I know."

"And you know if you had second thoughts... I just want you to know that you have options."

April brushed sweaty blades of hair from her face.

"Are you saying you'd adopt this baby if I didn't want it?"

"I'm just putting it out there."

April shook her head. What was there to say to that? Something about it made her angry and she felt like taking off in a gallop away from the stinking carnival air and the fawning interest of her friend. Just then, Ethan shouted and waved to the two women frantically, a look of desperation stretched across his face. "Come here! It's

dying, Mom. It's dying."

They rushed over to the stall where a very fat cow was lying on her back, lowing.

"Oh my God!" Bonnie said. "She's not dying, honey. She's in labor, look." She pointed to the cow's vagina where two tiny hooves were emerging inside a voluminous watery sac.

Their commotion brought the owner over and April, on shaky legs, and Bonnie and Ethan on bended knee witnessed Burma the Jersey cow bringing her baby into the world. April had to resist the urge to vomit.

"I told Betsy we shouldn't have brought her," the owner said, getting down on his hands and knees. "But she tried to tell me she has women's intuition. This baby wasn't coming for another week, she says!"

"Wasn't that amazing?" Bonnie prodded as they left. April wished she could agree.

"Is that how I was born?" Ethan demanded, looking partially fascinated and disgusted, kicking dust at his feet into clouds that April had to avert her face from. Bonnie guffawed. "It did sort of feel like you had hooves..."



Bonnie drove April home silently. Even Ethan refrained from acting out, sucking happily on a lollipop nearly as large as his head. When Bonnie pulled into April's driveway she shut off the engine and stayed facing the garage door a moment without speaking.

"Bon bon?"

"Look, I'm sorry if I... if I went too far today. I'm sorry if I seem to want more than is my place."

April felt sorry for her friend, whom she'd known since high school and had once spent a whole night discussing the mysteries of losing their virginity. Bonnie was caught between her own troubled blood and her best friend.

"You just might want something for me that I don't even want for myself."

Bonnie raised an eyebrow and snagged her lip between her teeth in what April thought was an overly dramatic gesture.

"What do you mean?"

April felt tired. "I don't even know. Chalk it up to hormones."

Bonnie opened her mouth as if to protest the easy answer, but stopped herself. They bid each other goodbye and April shuffled into the house feeling as tired as in her old marathon training days.

Hal was asleep on the couch with a baby-naming book fallen onto the floor, spread open to boys' names. Theodore. Thomas. Trevor. April stood watching the soft rise and fall of his hairy chest and felt momentarily like Hal's return to her life was a conspiracy in effect, possibly by God, to stop her from doing foolish things. If Hal hadn't turned up a week after Cole had retreated from a future life shackled by wife and eventual child, April would have done one of two things: thrown herself desperately on Cole with the same historical results or run off to Mexico.

How Hal had known she was single again, if one could call it that, was something they had simply not discussed. Hal was content to be the permanent "in-between" more permanent now than ever. In the history of their fourteen-year friendship, they'd dated more than six separate times. He'd called it dating, at least, she'd thought of it merely as screwing until now.

Whether it was her stare or the sound of her breathing that did it, Hal woke.

"Back already?" he said, stretching.

She laughed, "I think so," she said, then walked to the window, placed a hand unconsciously on her stomach, and wondered if a fetus was capable of caring for its own future yet.

"Have fun?"

Her nose recreated the acrid smell of sweating children and synthetic popcorn and sugar commingled into one top note. She grimaced.

"Not exactly fun. More like distraction."

She could almost hear him thinking behind her. Hal seemed perpetually on the edge of speaking a sentence; one that April often felt would reveal a truth that would shed some needed light on their situation.

"You hungry?"

"No, I'm full of carnival food."

Hal got up and came around behind her, put his arms around her. She wanted to shrug him off. It wasn't out of spite or loathing; she loved the feel of his construction-worker arms, his smell like baby powder left in the sun. She didn't want his love though, until she could promise him that all shards of her feelings for Cole were pulled free from the sinews of her being... and that seemed so impossibly far away. If he wanted to stay, he could stay. If he wanted to be the male presence in her child's life, she couldn't see any reason not to give him that. But every caress of his recalled a gesture of Cole's, even if it was Cole's pale, slender hand pulling away from her, or gripping the meat of her arm too tightly in an argument. Though he had been hard to get close to, and often mean, she'd gotten used to his brand of love. Hal's was too easy, too available.

"What do you think about Tiberius as a name for a boy?" Hal whispered in her ear, digging for a laugh.

She smiled. "I think Tiberius is actually kind of interesting," she said, and then excused herself to lie down.

Total erasure of her lifelong insomnia was the one beauty of pregnancy. All her body required was the placement of her head against any surface remotely horizontal. She'd nearly fallen asleep standing up in the supermarket as she'd craned her head sideways to read a label.

She fell fast into the dark, tight desert of sleep, bumped only occasionally by a scattering of dreams that were more like someone else's vacation slides accidentally shoved into her unconscious. Jars of wet cocktail onions and bowls of slimy spaghetti were set upon a table. Larvae and fish swam through soupy lagoons. Cole strode in and out of these dark, primal dream spaces, as if searching for something he'd left. She woke startled by a cramp in her abdomen, the smell of Hal's eggplant parmesan creeping up the stairs into the bedroom.

She sat up, reassured that the cramp was not repeating, soothed her belly with her hand and forced herself to go downstairs. Once, Cole had pushed her across the room over an argument about something whose topic she could not remember. A bill? A glance she'd made at another man? The way she'd parked his car? She had fallen hard onto her tailbone, spraining her sacroiliac joint and bruising her lumbar ribs. He hadn't even said he was sorry. Since entering her fourth month, the sacroiliac joint that had almost healed completely had started to throb again, especially when going downstairs, as if to remind her constantly how she'd gotten into this state.

She hobbled on aching leg down to the kitchen and pulled up a chair to the table.

Hal, who had been married twice already, moved about the kitchen with grace, familiar with rituals of comfort. Cole often came home so late that she'd simply make

dinners for one, bearing his anger when he'd somehow expected her to know, psychically - she presumed - that she should have prepared something for him.

She still remembered the day when she had to tell Bonnie the truth about her brother. Bonnie had been contemplating running off with the young butcher at her market and had been difficult to corral into conversations that had anything to do with anything else.

They'd been sitting in Bonnie's backyard catching the fast forming drips off lime popsicles.

"Why do you look so glum?" Bonnie asked, after revealing what the butcher boy had said he wanted to do to her. A fat drop of green goo had splashed her white summer dress and she'd begun wiping it, only making the stain worse.

"Cole hasn't been home in two nights," April said.

"He loves to go fishing, doesn't he?" Bonnie said, turning the hose on to get the green out of her dress.

"No, Bon... he just doesn't come home. He hasn't gone fucking fishing."

Bonnie looked up then.

"He isn't always very nice to me, you know."

"No, I don't know."

April had put her face in her hands or possibly even gotten up and strode across the lawn. Bonnie had shut completely up about her potential infidelity.

"He's hard on me."

Bonnie had coaxed the truth out of her, but had been reluctant to believe it. For a week the two friends didn't speak while Bonnie sorted out the details for herself and finally came to admit that she had known her brother to be a "rough guy" on some level. He used to chase her and beat her up when they were kids. He'd murdered the guinea pig when she was ten, and he was twelve. Bonnie had bolstered her output of friendship from there, as if trying to make up for the failings of her brother.

Now, soothed by the smell of food cooking, April had a hard time placing Hal in her home, her life. The dream images of Cole walking through rooms stuck with her. Hal seemed like a borrowed thing, on loan from some service that helped single mothers. She had the good man in her life and the seed of the bad boy growing inside her but an anxiety pervaded, as if Cole was going to show up and tell her he'd changed his mind, that she and the baby belonged to him. Part of her was horrified by the idea, but another part of her, as she looked at Hal readying her meal, liked the idea more than she could admit to anyone. And guilt then followed. She was a cliché, one of those women on Jerry Springer who falls for the bad boy because she had an unavailable father, who craves torture over tenderness because it confirms her low self-esteem.

"Soda or water with dinner?" Hal asked, herding vegetables around in a skillet of oil.

"Water. I can get it myself."

"You can, but don't," Hal said, moving toward the water purifier before she could as much as push out her chair.

The summer evening was light and hot.

"Let's eat on the porch," she suggested. Hal nodded. "But after dinner I want to take you somewhere."

"Oh Hal, I'm not up for much."

"Trust me... it's just another... distraction. You'll have fun."

They ate his delicious eggplant parmesan and stirred veggies outside. When they

finished, Hal cleared everything away.

"Digest for a half hour, and then you're coming with me."

As she lay against the sofa staring out at the tall, slightly withered pink and purple heads of the Cosmos she'd planted in spring, there came another twinge in her uterus, sharp enough to make her catch her breath.

She almost called out for Hal but instead hobbled to the bathroom. A few drops of blood marred her underwear. Spotting and cramping were both normal signs. It happened to women, especially women who were closer to thirty-five. She put a maxi pad into her panties and wondered if she should call the doctor. She didn't want to tell Hal, to raise his anxieties unnecessarily. She returned to the couch and rested as he had suggested and took three Tylenol just in case, before Hal shepherded her off to his truck.

"Where are we going?"

"Surprise," Hal said.

She wanted to tell him that she didn't care for surprises just now, but every time she thought of thwarting his efforts to be sweet to her, something stopped her.



The drive out to Drake's Beach, though longer than she wanted to sit in a car, had the effect of lulling her. Her whole body felt swollen with a sedative bloat, like she had turned into a large round sphere instead of a person, the food and the comforting monotony of the road ahead acting like an analgesic.

Hal had no children, and April was worried that he had more invested in her own child than she did, that he would love this baby not only more than her, but more than she could love her own baby.

Would she spend the rest of her life looking at a simulacrum of Cole? Hear an inflection reminiscent of that sharp vocal punctuation of his, watch tiny demonstrations by her child of his big, lively gestures that had won her over when she was sixteen? She had known both men for too long. Should she make a break now, go back and suffer the oppressive supervision of her parent's house and end ties with Hal for good? Because he couldn't love her if not for this shiny slice of promising future in her belly, could he?



She had fallen asleep to the lullaby of the car on the road and the sudden halt of motion woke her as Hal pulled into the parking lot at the beach.

"Wake up, babe," he said, resting a warm, large hand on her thigh. Another tiny cramp squeezed her uterus. She got out of the car and felt a rush of well-being at the smell of ocean.

"It's pretty," she said. "Water looks icy, though."

"We're not going in the water... unless you want to?" Hal smiled.

"I forgot my wet suit," she said.

Hal rummaged in the back of the truck and returned with something large and vaguely triangular in shape.

"What is that?"

He took her hand. "C'mon out here, I'll show you."

They pushed out onto the sand, littered with dead kelp and water-smoothed wood and stone. A handful of people dotted the beach, and one crazy surfer paddled, belly on his board, out to catch a wave.

Hal unfurled the item in his hands and April realized, finally, what it was.

"A kite?"

"Yup. Made it myself."

It was built like a miniature hang glider with two rope spindles instead of one and looked almost like something that required a pilot.

The wind was gentle, but enough to get the kite off the ground and once in the air, Hal maneuvered it deftly with tiny manipulations of his fingers and hands, sometimes it looked like the kite was simply holding him up.

"Now you try," Hal said. April looked at the ungainly thing. Her hands felt clumsy and swollen.

"I don't know if I can."

"You can," Hal said.

He handed her the spindles then took the end of the kite and moved away from her, jogging a little until April could feel the place where wind and her own body were at an exact tension. But the kite was big and heavy and she felt suddenly so small and incapable. It would rise into the air for a few seconds and then plummet back to earth.

It reminded April of a time when Cole took her to the long stretch of green down by the Marina in San Francisco to watch the kites. She had been mesmerized by the airy dance of all those brightly colored flags and had begun to follow one in particular held by a good looking man, following its dip and swirl with patient eyes. Cole had dragged her from the park finally, his thin sharp fingers carving a string of bruises into her arm. In the car he had accused her of wanting to go home with the man holding the kite she'd been watching.

As she thought about this, the kite under Hal's instruction nosed down into the sand again and April shook her head and dropped the spindles at her sides feeling discouraged. Like somehow this was a test for her future and she was failing. Hal came toward her. "Don't give up," he said.

Another pinch tore through her uterus and this one was sharp enough to make her wince aloud. Hal noticed.

"What is it, sweetie?"

April breathed in deeply, the way she used to through the three-hundredth sit-up. When she let go of the chord of air a long, snaky sob slid out past her guard.

Hal stared at her, looking helpless, but his gaze wasn't the judgmental glare of Cole's who used to feel manipulated by her crying.

"I... I can't fly this stupid thing."

"It takes practice. That's what you're doing. Practicing."

"I don't want to do it. I don't want to learn."

Hal looked at his red and yellow kite, lovingly cut and sewed to the light frame, April imagined. She felt suddenly guilty again, like she was rejecting him by failing to fly his creation.

"Hal... I... Ow!"

This cramp was bigger and more fierce than any other she'd felt yet. She put her hands on her belly then, to support it or hold it. Hal looked alarmed.

"You're in pain!"

"I'm having these cramps," she said. "I don't think this is a good sign."

As she said the words, she became aware of a shivery fear rising from her spine, a sense that if something happened with her pregnancy she was giving Hal permission to leave her.

"We should get you home then, call the doctor."

"No. Not yet," she said. "Let me just go to the bathroom. I want to try the kite again. I'm O.K."

Hal looked unconvinced, but he rarely pushed his agenda on her. He walked her to the bathroom and April sat down on the toilet afraid of what she would find. A series of smaller cramps began to course through her, the kind she used to get before her period began.

She pulled her underwear down and saw that the pad she had installed there was heavily spotted with blood. It was happening. She had read the literature. Miscarriages could happen at any time, even in the second trimester. It was normal; it just happened to some women.

April washed her hands in the cold water and dried them under the warm air device. She hobbled outside where Hal stood, clutching his kite like a child.

"Honey?"

"Let's fly the kite again. I'm O.K.," she said.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

He stared at her a moment before agreeing.

She let Hal unfurl the triangular bird again and held onto the spindles like they were the controls to an airplane. Like they could hold much more than that tiny cloth creature aloft.

"Don't try to control it so much as just follow it, just feel where the tension picks up and then try to keep it riding the current," Hal instructed.

He moved a step away and the kite lifted up in the air but quickly fell back to earth. A cramp rippled her uterus. She breathed in, motioned for Hal to try again. This time she would feel the place where the kite grabbed the sky, where it wanted to ascend and meet the wind. And though it was only for a few seconds, the feeling was enough to urge her to do it again. Suddenly the kite was not just another ungainly object she had to magically put into the air; it was a living thing hungry to stay alive.

The kite finally rose and stayed up. April took steps backward, keeping the tension of the string taut, breathing, following, not controlling, and it occurred to her for the first time that maybe Hal was here because he wanted to be.

She could have stayed there all day, through the night until her arms grew numb. The dance of kite and her body made a sense her mind couldn't name. She and the kite had been one solid line. When the airborne craft finally hit a pocket of dead air and drifted lazily to the ground, Hal ran up to her, his cheeks wind-reddened, laughing. "Seven minutes!" he said. It had felt like hours to April.

Her belly quivered, she felt slightly feverish and elated.

"I guess I should get back... should call the doctor," she said, but felt no alarm.

"Is it... ?"

"I think so."

"Are you sad?" he asked.

"Are you?" she said.

Hal smiled and put his arm around her. "It's hard to be sad when I've got my arm around the woman I love."



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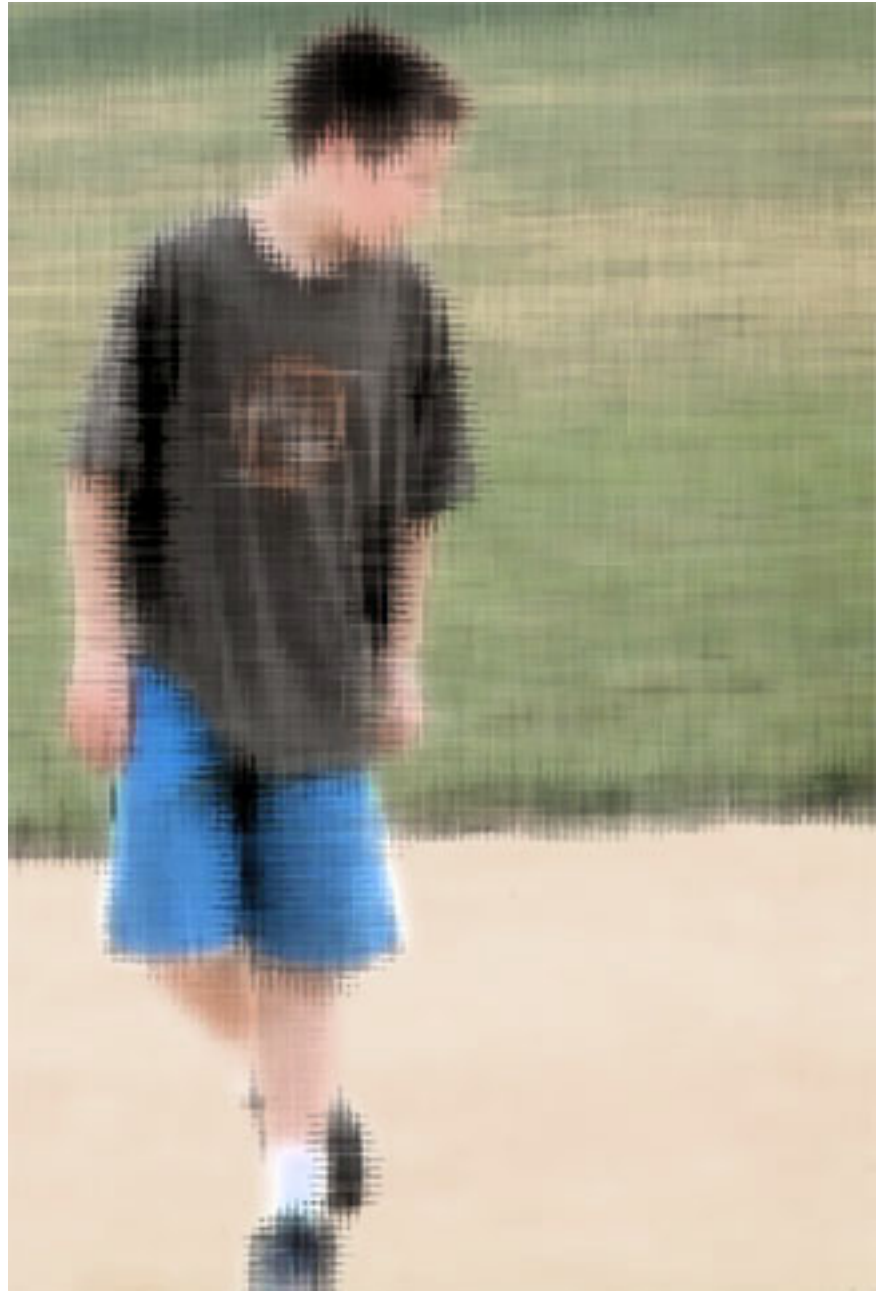
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## The Summerset Review

# The Summerset Review

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When I  
Was a  
Kid...



by  
Alan M.  
Danzis

... I thought life was harder than it really needed to be.

... I thought garbage men had it easy. I figured they only worked twice a week because we only had our garbage picked up on Mondays and Thursdays; little did I know, the other days of the week, they were in other neighborhoods, picking up other people's old refrigerators, ruined couch cushions, and banana peels.

... we didn't have any color televisions in my house because they cost "too much friggin' damn money."

... my father said I had to eat dirt if I didn't eat my vegetables. I ate dirt every night until Mommy complained she didn't have any soil left for her potted plants.

... I dented my little red wagon when I crashed into Mr. Stevenson's mailbox; to this day, the "lil' bastard" has not been found.

... my youngest sister Kate treated me like her hero.

... I cried a lot.

... I thought human beings controlled the traffic lights. I thought there were little, tiny cameras mounted to each traffic light and in some huge, office building downtown, people sat in front of little video screens deciding who to let in and when, while drinking their cups of coffee. My brother thought something a little different: he thought there were midgets inside the traffic poles. He was stupid.

... my father took me to the track and didn't say a single word to me the entire time.

... I had a crush on a red-headed girl.

... my older brother Eric kept four separate hamsters named Jovi, Axl, Duff, and Bon in the garage, secretly, that all lasted a week or so before succumbing to carbon monoxide poisoning.

... I swallowed a pirate Lego man with a brown beard painted on his yellow face.

... my mom put notes in my lunchbox that said things like, "I love you," "You're a good son," "You're the best," and "You are a good boy."

... my father was always falling asleep on the couch.

... I was scared of monsters under the bed.

... I thought that when I looked into a bathroom mirror at school, I was looking into a video camera and another man was looking at me on a video screen in a big room with lots of other video screens.

... I left my favorite red jacket on the bus after coming home from school and my father grounded me for four weeks. He also made me mow the lawn for the rest of the year (about seven months) even though I was six years old. When I lost the new jacket, he smacked me across the face and told me he wasn't going to give me any more money until I learned the value of it.

... I liked Flintstones vitamins.

... my younger sister Debbie liked it when I gave her noogies. I did not like it when Eric gave them to me.

... I went camping in the woods with Eric once a month.

... I fantasized about one day getting the chance to move in with Bert and Ernie. I cried the day my father told me they were just puppets.

... Kate begged me to play Chutes and Ladders with her all the time.

... I was scared to lie to my teachers when I didn't do my homework.

... I cried when a bird crashed into a window on our porch and died. I spent three hours

watching him struggle to try and get back up again; Eric took a picture. Mom yelled at him and hugged me.

... I felt like people were always looking at me and making fun of me. Whether it was my big black glasses, my pimples, or the scar just below my chin, I knew people thought there was something wrong with me.

... I liked peanut butter on toast.

... I bit my fingernails twice a day. My father smacked me on the knuckles every time.

... I liked cherry-flavored soda.

... teachers at my school thought I was very well behaved.

... my father thought they were too lenient.

... my mom read me a different Berenstain Bears book every night. One night, Sister would be scared about going to the doctor's office. Another night, Brother would be having nightmares. By the end of the week, Papa had taught them the value of saving money and Mama taught them about the joy of giving.

... I dreamed about becoming a movie director.

... I also dreamed about becoming a lawyer.

... I even dreamed about becoming a taxi driver. My father said that job was more likely.

... Kate liked it when I called her Kat.

... my mom said I would grow up and marry a nice girl with a big smile.

... Eric and I made home movies with our father's 8mm.

... Debbie would sneak into my bed to hide whenever my father was yelling.

... I used to lick all the icing off cupcakes before eating them.

... I used to try to make anagrams out of road signs when we went on family trips to the beach twice a year.

... my mom called me Mikey.

... I knew that I wanted to name my first daughter Annie. In my world, I figured I would always have a least one daughter.

... I pulled my pants down for the little girl who lived across the street from us. She giggled and pulled hers down too. Then we both laughed and went back inside after recess.

... my father used to let me pick up the beer cans he threw at the TV.

... I liked butterscotch ice cream.

... Mommy cried a lot.

... I was scared to go in telephone booths because I thought I might get stuck.

... Kate cried when I cut all the hair off her Barbie dolls with plastic scissors I snagged from her Li'l Miss Sewing kit.

... I thought Dracula was real.

... Eric would punch me in the shoulder every other day because he wanted me to build up strength there so one day, I could "beat the living crap-ola outta some wise-ass fourth grader."

... Kate used to sit on my lap while I read my comic books.

... red was my favorite color.

... my father used to beat Mommy every time his casserole was too cold, his beer was too warm, and her ass was "too goddamn big."



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## The Somerset Review

# The Summerset Review

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They say nowadays people can expect to go through three careers, so I clung to this fact as I sold the coffee shop franchise and said goodbye to the long hours and big paycheques in favour of teaching fifteen- to eighteen-year olds how to be entrepreneurs. The high school granted me status at the top of the salary grid thanks to my fifteen years in the private sector, so the pay's not as bad as you might think, and I get to be a hero to my two children who, at eight and eleven, are young enough to give me this opportunity.

The first day was perfunctory. A staff meet and greet, distribution of timetables, class lists and the afternoon to make sure textbooks, course outlines and lesson plans are in place. Part of being an entrepreneur is working well with people, so it wasn't a problem making a good impression on my department, but when I went to sleep that night something was different. I awoke with a sense of apprehension, and as I straightened my tie in the mirror and looked at a promotional pennant from the store, I knew more than my job would change. Two deep breaths and I entered the living room to see my wife Cheryl eating a bowl of cereal with a newspaper in her lap.

"High school, huh?" she said with a grin.

"Yeah."

"That's a long way from running your own business."

"Yeah."

"Are you nervous?"

"No."

"Then why are you holding my squash bag instead of your briefcase?"



Two hours later I stood before a class of thirty-five seventeen-year olds with glassy eyes. I slid a set of silver relaxation balls in one hand and held a piece of white chalk in the other. After counting heads with the chalk, I stepped toward the class and said, "Eighteen boys, seventeen girls. That's close to a fifty-fifty split, but you won't find anything close to that on most executive teams in the country. Does that mean that men are better at business than women? No. Does it mean that men have traditionally had more opportunity than women? Absolutely. Twenty-five thousand small businesses are started every year in this country, yet less than a third are run by women. And if business is the pulse of a capitalist life, does that suggest that women have less to say about being alive? There is a copy of The Entrepreneur's Handbook on each of your desks."

Caterina, a Russian girl with a thick accent, put up her hand.

"Yes?"

Her slender finger pointed to the relaxation balls.

"What are those?"

I held up the silver balls so the class could inspect them. "These? They're relaxation balls. I used to hand gesture too much when I worked in business, so I started using them to keep my hands occupied."

Darren, a handsome guy with cornrows and a movie star smile interjected.

"Sort of like a pacifier?"

The class laughed and for a moment I wanted to laugh too.

"I guess you could look at it that way. O.K., so we're supposed to start with debating."

"I don't know how to debate, sir," Darren said.

The class didn't know whether to laugh or wait for me to explain, so I stepped toward his desk.

"Really?"

"Yeah, I only know how to argue."

The class got that cue, but many of the laughs were nervous, the type that come from relief that they're not the only ones who don't understand something.

"Fair enough," I said. "How many people feel they don't know how to debate?"

Most of the hands went up, including a kid's at the back with his head buried so far into the nook of his arm on his desk I was sure he was asleep.

"O.K., so then maybe we should start with something else."

I pivoted so the heel of my shoe made a sharp sound and stepped again towards Darren's desk.

"How do you feel about tipping?"

"What do you mean?"

"Etiquette suggests we leave twenty percent."

He scratched at a carefully-kept goatee, saying, "Etiquette can kiss my ass."

The class oohed loud now, and I had to work harder at not smiling when Amanda, a thin girl with a ponytail, spoke with a voice strong enough to silence the room.

"Seriously, you never tip?"

"Never," Darren said. "Not anybody. Not my barber, not waiters, not the pizza man."

"Well you should. That's how those people make a living. It's a service and it's important. It's hard work, so I say they deserve a tip."

Darren leaned into his seat, his arms spread across the back of his chair.

"I believe you feel that way, Amanda, because from what I hear you deserve a tip every Friday night."

A mean-spirited but genuine break of hysterics flowed through the room warning me to regain control, so instead of pressing forward, I sat on my desk and pointed at Darren with the chalk.

"Be specific this time. Why don't you believe in tipping?"

"There's no reason for it. My mom works at a bakery. Should everyone tip her because she pulls a cupcake off a tray? It's extortion."

"That's a good point. Imagine if I had a tip jar at the front of the class and if you liked the lesson, you left a tip at the end of the period and if you didn't..."

"We spit in it," the kid with his head on the desk said without looking up.

A ripple of laughter distracted for a moment, so I rolled with the energy, nodding in an exaggerated manner when Darren stood up.

"It's true, and if you think about it, we tip the wrong people. I mean, if you're gonna tip anyone tip the man who made your meal, not the man who brought it to you."

"Now you're thinking," I said.

Darren turned to Amanda, his hands accentuating every thought with movement like a conductor.

"And if we're doing it out of sympathy, then tip my mom because working in that heat and scrubbing stoves is no fun."

I slid off the desk and stepped towards them, a little too close to a guy in the front row who avoided eye contact. "O.K., so you're a believer in bottom lines. Can I assume then that you'd agree that an unsatisfactory paper deserves an unsatisfactory mark?"

"Unless there were circumstances," Darren said.

"Such as?"

"A bad day," the kid with his head on the desk blurted out.

"For one, yeah," Darren followed. "A bad day or a heavy schedule that week."

"So you acknowledge the human factor?"

"Sure."

"Then I want you all to take out a piece of paper and write the reasons for tipping on one side and the reasons against tipping on the other."

The students organized themselves and I took a moment to be pleased with a job well done when Caterina raised her hand.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Caterina?"

Her slender finger pointed again the relaxation balls.

"Can I play with your balls?"

The class erupted into laughter and once again I had to hold back a smile.

And that was one teaching day down. When I first quit my own business I expected to mark these days off like a prisoner, but it's clear my students won't let time pass so blandly. High school definitely isn't the private sector, and this isn't going to be easy. My first day taught me this, and I'm sure the days that follow will teach me more.



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## Contributors' Notes

### **Scott Carter**

is from Toronto and his short fiction has appeared in various literary journals across North America including Lichen, Littoral West, Cenotaph, tsur, Inertia, Paumanok Review, and The Muse Apprentice Guild. He has written three short films that debuted in Los Angeles at the Exploding Cinema Film Festival as well as playing at the Toronto Online Film Festival, the Yorkton Film Festival in Saskatchewan and The Digital Gun Film Festival in Toronto. He has recently optioned a feature screenplay with Caliban Productions. He can be contacted at [scott\\_carter@sympatico.ca](mailto:scott_carter@sympatico.ca).

### **Alan M. Danzis**

is a recent graduate from Loyola College in Maryland and now works as an Assistant Account Executive at Spector and Associates, a PR firm in NYC. He has had seven stories featured in over ten e-zines last year, including Writer's Monthly, Word Riot, and Ink Magazine. He's also appeared in print: "New Journey" was published in Scribble, a Baltimore literary magazine, last spring. He always credits his parents, his brother, his dog, and his friends as his various muses. And he thanks them for being easily manipulated into characters for his stories. You may write to him at [adanzis@verizon.net](mailto:adanzis@verizon.net).

### **Gerard Marconi**

lives in Maryland, where he teaches humanities on the Internet and pursues his passion for visiting museums and writing about famous artists or works of art. He has never seen the Woman of Willendorf, but he credits Alex Chee at the Wesleyan Writers Conference for urging him to pursue the serendipitous nature of this story. He has studied fiction writing in workshops at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Iowa Summer Writing Program, and won Honorable Mention in the Richard Yates Short Story Competition sponsored by Night Train magazine. He can be reached at [gmarconi@frederick.edu](mailto:gmarconi@frederick.edu).

### **Jordan Rosenfeld**

is the co-founder/editor of H.E.R. Magazine, and a past editor for both Moxie Magazine and Word Riot Literary Journal. She has completed two novels and is the radio host of "Word by Word," a literary show on KRCB ([www.krcb.org](http://www.krcb.org)). Her writing has been featured recently in issues of Skyline Magazine, InkPot Literary Journal, and is forthcoming in the anthology Food, Foibles & Family Traditions. She is the editor of the anthology Zebulon Nights, released in September 2003 from Word Riot Press. You may write to her at [writelife@earthlink.net](mailto:writelife@earthlink.net).

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## Guidelines for Submissions

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Writers are invited to submit contemporary short stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. No sci-fi, horror, graphic erotica, poetry, or subject matter with emphasis on death or loss are likely to be accepted. Fantasy, romance (literary), and overall lighter stories will be given more serious consideration. We enjoy seeing essays that enlighten us in subtle ways.

All submitted work is assumed to be original. Reprints, novel excerpts, and simultaneous submissions are accepted. We read year-round.

Email submissions to [editor@summersetreview.org](mailto:editor@summersetreview.org). Please be sure to state whether your piece is fiction or an essay. It is preferable that the submission be an attachment in standard manuscript MS Word format. If you are sending a piece in plain text, please be sure to clearly designate paragraphs, alignment, and italics. Please do not simply give a link on the web where the story appears.

If you wish to correspond via hard-copy, send your submission to: 25 Summerset Dr., Smithtown, NY 11787, and be sure to include a SASE (and proper postage and envelope if the manuscript is to be returned). All submissions receive replies, usually in less than six weeks.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even with this, we prefer a brief note accompanying the submission. We are not sure what we want to read in this note, but would appreciate the extra effort, rather than a blank email with an attachment. We usually comment on material that got further along in the review process. On pieces we accept, we usually suggest minor editorial changes and always confer with the author.

Authors retain all rights to their work, and will see galleys of accepted pieces for review. Unfortunately, contributors cannot be paid for accepted submissions.

To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, writers are asked to read The Summerset Review or consult our [Recommended Reading](#) list. We also suggest that contributors be familiar with the writing found in quality literary publications. Some examples that have inspired us in both content and the manner in which they have handled submissions, based on first-hand experiences, are found [here](#).

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Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 <sup>rd</sup> issue of The New Yorker, 1997
Anderson, Dale Gregory	Girl in the Tree, The	From the Spring/Summer issue of Alaska Quarterly Review, 2003
Ashton, Edward	<a href="#">Night Swimmer</a>	Online at The Blue Penny Quarterly, Spring/Summer, 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From Other Voices #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From Quarterly West #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection A Relative Stranger, published in 1990
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of Bananafish, 1998
Broyard, Bliss	<a href="#">Mr. Sweetly Indecent</a>	From the Fall issue of Ploughshares, 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From Other Voices #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of Grand Tour, 1997
Cheever, John	Stories of John Cheever, The	A collection published in 1980
Christopher, Nicholas	<a href="#">Veronica</a>	A novel published in 1996
Crowe, Thomas Rain	<a href="#">Firsts</a>	Online at Oyster Boy Review in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From Alaska Quarterly Review's Intimate Voices, Other Lives, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	<a href="#">Finishing First</a>	From the Summer issue of Lynx Eye, 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of The New Yorker in Fall, 1990
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of New Letters, 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	<a href="#">Enchanted Night</a>	A novella published in 1999
Murakami, Haruki	South of the Border, West of the Sun	A novel published in 1998
Offill, Jenny	<a href="#">Last Things</a>	A novel published in 1999
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection Nine Stories published in 1953
Tilghman, Christopher	Way People Run, The	From the September 9 <sup>th</sup> issue of The New Yorker, 1991

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[Alaska Quarterly Review](#)

[Black Warrior Review](#)

[Hayden's Ferry Review](#)

[Missouri Review](#)

[Other Voices](#)

[Oyster Boy Review](#)

[South Dakota Review](#)

[StoryQuarterly](#)

[The Sun](#)

[Quarterly West](#)

[West Branch](#)