

Summer 2007

The  
Summerset  
Review



# The Summerset Review

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# The Sunset Review

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## Editors' Notes



We're thinking of calling this issue our Women's Issue because, as you will notice, all the selections are from the female gender. Even the images in the one art collection celebrate this side of the species. Was all of this intentional? Good Heavens, no. We swear. It just worked out that way. We saw it coming as we neared the close of our readings for this period, reviewing ever more desperately and diligently submissions from men. But in the end, the pieces we enjoyed the most were those you see here. We're wondering what is going on with our taste.

All you gentlemen out there: Come on, now. Let's see some thoughtful, wonderful writing. Send us interesting topics, things that will take us away. Don't let these women get the best of us.

Our Summer 2007 issue begins with a creature known to wreak havoc in our neighborhoods. Renee Carter Hall's "Moon, June, Raccoon" sets the devilish little guy in a different and whimsical light. The hunt is on for a rascal of another kind, a hermit crab, in Jen Michalski's "Houdini." It has been almost three years since we've published a collection of artwork, and we thought to make up for that with six wonderful images from Sabine Maier in an untitled set. Once again, animals are a main concern, this time in the story, "The Floured Breadboard Café and Other Abandoned Pursuits," which introduces the new writer Michelle Panik. And finally, letters chronicle three generations of families and summer vacations in Brenda Whiteside's "Amanda in the Summer." We hope you enjoy these pieces as much as we do.

We thought we'd have some fun with our Lit Pick of the Quarter. Typically we highlight here one story recently read in a current literary magazine, recommending it to our readers. This time, in addition to the recommendation, we'd like to pose a question and elicit answers. The story is entitled, "Daily at the Gate of the Temple Which Is Called Beautiful," written by Quan Barry and appearing in the Fall/Winter 2006/2007 issue (#63) of *Quarterly West*. The short story is set on the Great Barrier Reef, and asks if every day is paradise, is it really paradise?

But that's not our question. We won't spoil the ending, but the ending is precisely why we mention this piece. What did you think of it? How did the story leave you? We'd like to know. Write us, please. Give us your take. Here is an excerpt from an earlier part of the story:

Imagine Adam and Eve in all their innocence, the garden unseasonal, in a way textureless because there is nothing else to compare it to—the trees with their furred vines, the pale blue rivers as if singing. How long does it last? The recognition of beauty. How can Adam and Eve understand that God made this perfect place for them? How can they understand the idea of perfection itself? In a way, to live in Eden is to live without wonder because it is all you know. If all you know is joy, then what is joy?

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*The Summerset Review*

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A literary journal released quarterly on the 15th of March, June, September, and December on the Internet, and periodically in print form. Founded in 2002, the journal is devoted to the review and publication of unsolicited short stories and essays.

All correspondence and submissions should be emailed to [editor@summersetreview.org](mailto:editor@summersetreview.org). Postal mailing address: 25 Summerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA.

This publication is made possible, in part, with a grant from the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP), supported by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), a state agency. We are very thankful for the support and encouragement these organizations have given our journal and the literary community.



*The Summerset Review* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, incorporated in New York State.

ISSN 1933-7175

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Hoping no one could see me, I placed the little package under the tree, bowed three times to the full moon, briefly pretended to be looking for something in the withered grass, just in case someone was watching, then ducked back into the house. The screen door screeched as I yanked it closed. I had three new mosquito bites on my legs.

In short, I was itchy, embarrassed, and completely desperate.

I had found the spell—complete with step-by-step color illustrations—in a book in the New Age section of the local megastore. I hated buying the book, but I was afraid I wouldn't be able to remember all the details, and who knew what would happen if you messed that sort of thing up.

So I'd followed the directions to the letter, saying the words, carving the two hearts into the apple, wrapping it up in pink paper and ribbon like a little gift. The directions said to take it to a "natural place, like a park or the woods." There weren't any woods nearby, and the closest park was a twenty-minute drive away, so I'd figured that under any tree was natural enough, and the one in my own postage-stamp backyard was going to have to do.

Try to understand, I had already been to two weddings that June, both friends from college. An engagement party was coming up, another friend just had her first baby, and another one was trying. And I was sick of being happy for everyone else, sick of blind dates and stupid matchmaking websites, sick of drinking coffee I didn't like with men I could never like, let alone love.



And anyway, they say the full moon makes people do crazy things. Of course, they say love makes people do crazy things, too, but I wouldn't know anything about that.

So I did the spell, and I tried to laugh at myself, and I geared up for another exciting evening watching stupid sitcoms and scratching my mosquito bites and eating mint chocolate chip ice cream.

And I didn't think about the spell again. At least, not until exactly twenty-four hours later.



When I heard the scratching at the screen door, I thought it was the neighbors' cat, a scruffy orange tom who sometimes forgets exactly which townhouse he belongs in.

I turned on the outside light.

It was a raccoon.

We looked at each other. I noticed it was sitting up on its haunches, holding something.

"Hi," it said.

I took a step backward. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. He, on the other hand—the voice was definitely male—kept talking.

"Nice night, huh? Not too humid. Good breeze."

I saw then what he was holding: my apple, the two carved hearts turning brown.

"Listen," he continued, "I'm, you know, flattered and everything. But... well, I just don't think it would work out in the long run. So I thought—it's really a sweet gesture, and you're not all that bad-looking for a human, but I really can't accept this." And he held out the apple with both paws.

"Raccoons don't talk," I managed, finally.

"Actually, we do. Everything does. You just don't listen."

Slowly, his words started to sink in. I looked at the apple. "That wasn't for you."

He eyed me skeptically. "You left it under my tree."

"It was..." Why was I explaining myself to a raccoon? "Never mind. It was a mistake. You can keep it if you want."

The raccoon shrugged and took a bite. "Y'know, there's a produce stand about two miles from here where you can get apples that actually taste like something."

I stared at him while he finished the apple. Was this the first sign of some kind of nervous breakdown, seeing talking animals on your back porch? Or maybe it was an early warning sign of a stroke. Did people hallucinate with those? Should I call 911?

I considered my options. I could close the door, go back to the empty laughter on TV for another night, and try to dismiss this as some bizarre stress-induced episode.

Or...

Curiosity got the better of me, and I took a deep breath. "Would you like to come in?"



"Nice place," he said, glancing around.

"It's kind of a mess," I apologized. "I wasn't expecting... guests."

"I've seen worse." He held out a paw. "Name's Krispy Kreme, by the way."

I blinked. "Your name's *Krispy*..."

He held up his other paw to stop me. "My mother had a sweet tooth, O.K? Considering that my sister is Sara Lee and my brother is Ben&Jerrys, I think I came off all right. Call me Kris."

I shook his paw. "I'm—"

"Karen Sheffield, thirty-one, bachelor's in English, works for Taylor & Bradshaw, and you write some pretty decent poetry even though you keep getting rejection slips." He paused. "You might want to think about buying a shredder." With that, he loped off to the fridge.

I followed. "Wait a minute. How do you know how to read?"

Kris sampled three different flavors of protein shake, wrinkling his nose at each one. "The Martins down the street have a kid who watches all that educational stuff. They keep their windows open a lot. I can read, count to twenty, sing 'C is for Cookie,' and figure out which thing isn't like the others. I think my education's pretty much complete."

I couldn't argue with that.

"Speaking of education," he added, tossing the shake cans into the trash and moving on to the freezer, "we need to teach you a thing or two about eating. First off," he squinted at a frozen dinner, "disodium inosinate is not food. And neither is that third-rate Chinese takeout stuff you get twice a week."

"I'm supposed to take culinary advice from an animal who eats out of dumpsters?"

"Hey, I don't have much of a choice. And don't turn this around. We're talking about you here, not me." He left the kitchen and settled himself on the couch in the living room. "You don't have company over very much."

"How can you tell?"

He gestured to the couch. "Just your scent. Nothing male—or mingled," he added with a wink.

"Don't tell me you learned *that* on educational TV."

"Yeah, well, the Robinsons never close their blinds." He stretched. "So why not?"

"Why not what?"

"Why aren't you out with somebody tonight instead of leaving lousy apples in your yard?"

I started to give some kind of glib answer, but then I stopped and actually tried to think of the best way to explain it. "I'm tired of being with people and still being lonely."

Kris studied me a moment. "Hm. Well, being lonely with people still seems

better than being lonely by yourself. At least it has more potential."

"Maybe." I shrugged.

"So what are you looking for?"

I had used up all my energy for introspective answers. "I don't know. The same things everybody's looking for."

"Honest, caring, loyal, sensitive, good sense of humor?"

I cringed. Those were the qualities I'd written on the pink paper used to wrap the apple. "Yeah. So?"

"The perfect guy."

"I guess."

Kris shook his head. "Listen, when you spend as much time as I do going through people's garbage, you find out more about them than you really want to know. And the first thing you learn is, nobody's perfect. I can tell you, everybody's just as messed up and scared and unsure as you are, just in their own way."

"You must have watched Mister Rogers, too," I said dryly, and turned on the TV.

"I'm just saying," he replied with a shrug, then settled down to watch. "You got any popcorn?"

I sighed.



A few nights later he was at the back porch again, dragging some wrinkled bundle of paper behind him.

"This is your idea of a hostess gift?" I asked as he handed it to me.

"Just take a look."

We went inside. It was a sketchbook, the spiral kind. About half the pages had been torn out, and the rest were wavy and stained with things I didn't want to think about.

I opened it to the first page, and my jaw literally dropped. It was a portrait, precisely rendered in pencil, of a man roughly my age, with a thoughtful expression and bright, childlike eyes that defied the lines beginning to form around them. The subject was not entirely what most people would call handsome, but he had an interesting face that welcomed closer study. The page was half torn out, but otherwise intact.

"Where did you get this?" I asked.

Kris shrugged. "Ran across it. I figured, you know, you were into the arts and all, so..."

The next page was a quick sketch of a dog, probably no more than ten lines and a bit of rough shading. But it looked so alive I expected to see it breathe.

There were other drawings, some simple, some more elaborate, even a study in ink that had turned into more of a watercolor thanks to what looked like a coffee spill. All were sensitive and *real*, as if the graphite lines were trembling with life, itching to release the form into the world. Even a still life—two pears, a vase, and what looked like a dog toy—had personality.



Then the drawings became sketchier, the paper scrubbed raw from erasing. One half-completed drawing had a dark scribble of charcoal over it, as if the artist had gotten frustrated with the attempt. The next page was a ragged scrap of paper clinging to the spiral wire.

The rest of the pages were blank, but I looked at every one, pausing, as if something would appear there if I willed it. I felt disappointed, even angry. The person had incredible talent; how did this end up in the trash?

I looked for any identification, hoping for at least a name, but there was nothing. Then I looked back at the portrait and saw the tiny scribbles in the corners.

"Self-portrait," I read on the left, and on the right, "SJR."

"Not bad, huh?" Kris said when I looked up.

"Not bad? This is incredible. Why would somebody throw this away?"

Kris rummaged in the fridge for a soda. "Jeez, what d'you need diet for? You're what, a size five?" He cracked open a can, sipped, and winced.

"You didn't answer my question."

"I'm a raccoon, not a mind reader. Maybe it's the same reason why there are so many poems of yours that wind up covered in teabags and takeout cartons."

"Yeah, but... this is different. These are," I fumbled for words and couldn't find any, *"good."*

"One man's trash, I guess. So what's on TV?"

I handed him the remote and sat down on the couch. While Kris flipped from a game show to a documentary about elephants to a rap video, I sat with the sketchbook in my lap, turning the pages slowly, over and over, consumed by wonder.



The doorbell rang on my day off, in the middle of the afternoon. And, like a complete idiot, I opened the door, never mind that the guy on the other side wasn't anybody I was expecting and could very well have spent the rest of the day raping and torturing and killing me.

And then, like even more of an idiot, I stopped and stared at the guy for what felt like two days.

Because it was the guy from the sketchbook.

He was wearing a white polo shirt with "Scott" embroidered over a line of marching ants. "Hi," he said awkwardly, "um... Mrs. Sheffield? I'm Scott, from Pestbusters. Your husband called about the raccoon problem."

My husband?

Scott consulted his clipboard. "Kris?"

"Oh," I said, thinking fast. "That's... my brother, actually. Technically he owns the house, so he... takes care of things like that."

Scott nodded. "No problem. Let's take a look and see what we can do."

He advised the usual: tight-fitting lids on the trash cans, bungee cords, closely-spaced lattice work under the porch to keep them from getting

underneath. "I can try setting a trap," he finished, "but some of these guys are just way too smart for it."

What was I supposed to say? "Um... O.K."

"I've got one in the truck; I'll go get it."

"Wait." He stopped. "It won't... hurt him, will it?"

Scott smiled. "Only his pride. If we can catch him, we'll give him a dose of rabies vaccine and take him down to the wooded areas by the park. There's plenty of real food to forage for there. Raccoon paradise. I'll be right back."

As soon as he was gone, I grabbed the sketchbook from its place on the coffee table and stuffed it under the couch cushions. I was dying to ask him about it, but I couldn't think of any way to bring it up without sounding psychic—or possibly psychotic. Anyway, it seemed so... so *personal*, like asking somebody about a prescription bottle you saw in their medicine cabinet.

Scott set up the trap and baited it with a handful of peanuts, then handed me his card and said to call if anything showed up. If my fingers tingled a bit when they brushed his as I took the card, and if our eyes met a bit longer than was strictly necessary... well, I told myself that was just my imagination.

The next morning, the trap was empty, the peanuts untouched. I didn't see Kris that night, either.

Scott called me at work the next day. "Nothing yet," I told him.

A pause. "Well, if it's all right, I'd like to stop by and make sure everything's still set up. Is around seven O.K.?"

I could feel my heart pounding. "I thought you guys closed down at five."

"Well, officially, yeah. But my apartment's just two blocks over from your place, so it's not really out of my way." He sounded almost embarrassed. I loved that.

"Oh. Well, O.K. That'd be fine," I said, hurriedly. "I mean, if it's not too much trouble." I was babbling like a teenager.

I hung up and stared at the gray wall of my cubicle, then opened the manilla folder on my desk. I tried to look like I was reviewing paperwork, which was difficult, seeing as the folder held the self-portrait from the sketchbook. I'd felt a little strange bringing something so personal and true into the mundane surroundings of work, but at least I'd gotten over my first insane impulse to tack the sketch up where anyone could see it. Instead, I was sneaking glances at it like a girl with a pop-star pinup hidden in her algebra book.

Stuffing the folder back in my bag, I reminded myself that love at first sight was a ridiculous myth based on physical attraction, or concocted after the fact to give the relationship some feeling of destiny. I had always said that, and I had always believed it.

And I still did.

I thought.



I offered Scott a soda, which he accepted (at Kris' urging, I had stocked up on a wider variety of beverages). I made small talk about the weather, as well as the cleverness of raccoons in general and our suspect in particular.

(If he only knew.) I laughed at his genuinely funny jokes and was flattered when he laughed at my halfhearted ones.

But I still couldn't find a way to bring up the sketchbook, or anything even close to it.

On my way home from work the next night, I bought a sketchpad, an assortment of pencils, and a few sticks of charcoal. Then I cleared off my coffee table and arranged the supplies so they looked as if they'd been casually scattered there. I tried to do a drawing or two to complete the effect, but they ended up so hopeless that I crumpled the paper into balls, and, after a moment's thought, left them on the floor. Certainly anyone who had thrown away a sketchbook would be able to relate.

And it worked. "You're an artist?" Scott asked lightly when he came by a few nights later to check the trap.

I shrugged. "Not really. I thought I'd give it a try, but I think I'd better stick to writing poems."

"Poems, huh?" His voice took on that tone of slight awe, the one people who don't write get sometimes, as if I were having my verses chiseled into polished marble instead of published on obscure websites and in photocopied literary zines that no one's ever even heard of unless they've been published in them.

"Yeah," I said finally. "I mean, it's nothing major. What about you? Do you do anything... you know, creative?"

He glanced back at the coffee table and ran his hand through his hair. "I used to draw," he said slowly. "Painted a little. Mostly watercolors and inks. I... haven't for a while."

"Why not?" My mouth was dry.

"Mostly time, I guess."

Liar. People who say they don't have time for art usually mean that it isn't enough of a priority for them to make time for. These are the same people who will then spend two hours in front of the TV every night, because that isn't as demanding—or terrifying—as facing a blank page. I know, because I've been one of them.

"And I guess I just got frustrated," he added. "Nothing ever seemed to come out right."

Good God. What had he been envisioning, that drawings so good could still fall short?

"Do you, um..." I tried to swallow. "Still have any of your stuff?"

A shadow passed over his expression. Regret? "I threw most of it away. But... maybe I'll get back into it." He smiled. "If you'll show me some of your poems."

"Uh, sure." He might as well have asked me to take my clothes off. The thought of him reading my poems made me feel about as exposed. And yet, there was also that odd little flutter of excitement somewhere between my chest and my stomach, and already I was mentally rummaging through my files, trying to decide which ones to give him.

The trap was still empty, though there were some peanut shells inside, carefully arranged in a little pile, the raccoon equivalent of an obscene gesture.

Scott chuckled and shook his head. "I think this guy's worth a limerick or two." He cleaned out the shells and added another handful, then stood and turned back to me. "So... same time tomorrow?"



I spent so much time re-reading and shuffling through my poems that I had to print out fresh copies by the time I decided which ones I was least embarrassed by. I wondered if he was sketching away furiously at home, trying to draw something worth showing me.

The next night, he came in carrying a new sketchbook. He glanced at the trap, then sat down next to me on the couch, and I handed him the six poems I'd picked out, nothing too long or complicated, nothing too simplistic or silly.

I never know what to do while someone's reading my work. Part of me wants to stare at them, so I can pounce on every little nuance of facial expression. And part wants to leave the room, or possibly the country, to get away from the suspense.

He was on the last page now. And then it came—the little intake of breath, the pause, the slight sigh. When you're at a reading and the audience pauses and sighs that way, it's better than the applause. It means they're not just being polite, not even just being appreciative. It means they got it.

"These," he said softly, "are really good."

Then he handed me the sketchbook.

The first page was a softly-shaded sketch of a robin, his eyes bright and feathers glossy. He'd added a pale red-orange wash to its breast. It was, of course, perfect in every detail. I felt as if I'd never seen a robin until that moment, as if it were some fantastic creature from an ancient bestiary.

Then I turned the page, and I saw my own face looking back at me.

I must have appeared surprised, because he said hurriedly, "Some of the details might not be quite right. I usually work from photographs..."

I remembered hearing once that the point of art wasn't to portray what the artist saw, but how the artist *felt* about what he saw. And it was all here: the uncertain but thoughtful expression in my eyes, the faint lines here and there that I'd only recently begun to notice in the mirror, the hairstyle I'd had for the past eight years.

And through his eyes, it was beautiful. All of it. All of me.

I looked up. I had no idea what to say. He looked at me, and the silence warmed between us.

*Snap!*

A harsh metallic sound from outside. The trap had shut.

When we reluctantly went to look, I recognized Kris. And I could have sworn the raccoon winked at me as Scott loaded the cage into the truck.



I wrapped the last of the dishes carefully in newspaper and laid them in the box. My whole life sat around me, packed in cardboard, taped and labeled.

No, I corrected myself. Not my whole life. My old life. In just a few days—this with yet another admiring glance at my engagement ring—a new one would start.

I went out to the back porch, watching the summer's first fireflies winking in the grass. The moon was full and golden, and I laughed to myself, remembering the night almost a year before, when I'd tried to cast a spell, tried to summon love as if it were something I could give orders to. I had never told Scott anything about it. Maybe someday.

I almost tripped over the little package.

It was an apple, small and dusky red, wrapped in one of those lined pieces of newsprint that kids use in school when they're first learning how to write. The front side was some kid's story about his grandparents, with a gold star stuck at the top. On the back, I found a note written in wobbly crayon.

*Just to prove there's more to apples than those grocery store things. Nice place your fellow took me to. Nice little stream with great seafood. And I met someone, too. I think being able to count to twenty really did it for her.*

*Keep a light on for me at the new place. Maybe I'll bring the kids by sometime. Braeburn, Jonagold, and Nittany. Cute little furballs.*

*Kris.*

I polished the apple on my nightshirt and took a bite. The tangy sweetness sparkled on my tongue, familiar and new at once, and I ate the rest standing in moonlight, the June night warm and sweet around me, a poem I was living instead of writing down.



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## **HOUDINI** **BY** **JEN MICHALSKI**



We buy the girls a hermit crab while at the beach. In the gift shop, Caroline, six, and Rhea, four, watch dozens of pink- and purple-painted shells slowly crawl like bacteria around the wire tub before deciding on one with a conical, ridged shell and a meaty pointer. A sea sponge, a water cup, some food, and a smaller wire cage are purchased. As we ride the boardwalk train back to the hotel, names are tossed out, little Frisbees of conversation, Caroline and Rhea facing us, on our laps.

"What about Poseidon?" Matt, their father, suggests, after a list of Disney-inspired characters is rattled off by Caroline.

"Who's that?" Caroline asks, her windbreaker slouched off one shoulder, her blonde hair weighted and full, like a lampshade, framing her face.

"The king of the sea," he answers as Caroline considers, afraid of offending his better judgment. But the truth is Matt has never bothered much to learn the names of the Disney princesses that adorn the girls' nightgowns and live on their walls and in their DVDs.

"Not Poseidon," I answer, clutching the plastic bags of caramel corn and fudge. "It has to be something the girls like."

"But Mommy, I like Po... Pos..." Caroline protests.

"Especially not a name you can't pronounce," I say, fixing her coat with my free hand. "Let's all sleep on it and decide tomorrow."



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On the sleeper sofa at the hotel I hear Caroline and Rhea; little whispers of names for the hermit crab and giggles float around them. Across the room, I hear the crab moving slowly, like a minute hand in the dark, its claw scraping the wire of the cage in exploration of its boundaries. On the other side of the partition Matt and I lie on our bed, our bodies not touching. Slowly the little voices fall off, Matt snores softly, and the only sounds are the scraping claws, my breaths. We both wait for morning.

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That night and the next, the hermit crab manages to escape its wire and plastic carrier. Both mornings the girls search, in alternating fits of excitement and worry, along the baseboards of the hotel room. It is found both mornings in a sandy corner under the air conditioner, pinching its claw slowly like a blinking neon sign, warning us to retreat.

"It's our little Houdini," Matt laughs over breakfast. We have stopped at a coffee shop across from the hotel before hitting the beach. Outside a man begins setting up bikes for rental in an alleyway, red and green and black and blue frames gleaming in the sunlight like aluminum seahorses.

"Who's that?" Caroline asks, patting her scrambled eggs with the rounded side of her fork. Her plate becomes a landscape of soft yellow sea flicked by white foam caps.

"An escape artist," Matt answers, stirring his coffee with a dulled steel diner knife. "He could escape anything. You could lock him in a box and throw it into the bottom of the ocean, and he'd escape."

"That ocean outside?" Caroline stands and points over the heads of other diners.

"Even that ocean," he answers, making a motion for her to sit.

"Why don't you name your hermit crab Houdini?" I suggest, separating a muffin from its soft, waxy shell.

"I think your mother is onto something," Matt smiles, not looking at me. It is the first time we have agreed in weeks.

---

All morning the girls pack Matt into the damp sand.

"Try to get out, Daddy," Caroline taunts as Rhea dances around the sandy grave with her bucket and shovel.

"Hoo-dee," she laughs, her belly full and white and soft. Matt squints his eyes and tenses his body as if trying to escape, his bare, smooth head red and shiny, a vein rising from the depths of his neck. The girls giggle with delight and pack the sand tighter with their spread hands like little pink starfish. After awhile they lose interest, padding toward the surf. I stand over Matt.

"Looks like they've packed me in pretty tight, Sara," he grins devilishly at me, as if we've shared some precious secret of parenthood. He does not know I know about her, the young woman who hangs out at the bike shop we own. She is not much younger actually, three or four years, but she does not have the battle scars of marriage and children. "Can you help me out here?"

I consider leaving him, telling him, not digging him up. I imagine his

sunburned head. Can I imagine much more? I imagined those overnight biking trips, when I stayed home with the girls, watching DVDs and playing Candyland. I have imagined the muscles under their biking shorts, moving, contracting long after the day's ride has finished. I have imagined the way he slips out of her arms and back into my own, a kiss to my cheek before retiring to the garage, to his bike to work out, as he calls it, "one last kink."

I have not imagined the text messages from her on his cell phone.

"Come on—I'm burning up here," he says, slightly irritated. It is a tone with which I am more familiar. I bend over and grab Rhea's yellow plastic shovel, sticking it into his sand heart like a stake.

"Caroline, Rhea!" I catch the girls' attention. They are bent over in the surf, digging for sand crabs. "Come dig your father out."

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At home, Houdini lives on a windowsill in the girl's bedroom. They have cut out palm trees and coconuts from a Lilo and Stitch coloring book and taped them to the window panes around Houdini's cage. I wonder if they believe that the crab can fool himself in his captivity, that he is seconds away from the sea. Every night he escapes, taking a perilous two-foot drop from the low window ledge to the floor, moving slowly across the sandstone Berber carpet, toward a sea he will never find. Caroline marks the spots of his progress each morning with old poker chips Matt has given her, believing him to grow bigger and stronger through this nightly exercise.

"What if he misses his home, Mommy?" Rhea asks, standing before me, her fists tight like mine, as Caroline marks this morning's progress.

"This is his home, sweetie." I pick her up, feeling the solidness of her miniature. "He's part of our family."

"But what if he doesn't like us anymore?" She wriggles to face me. I can smell the faint scent of sleep about her.

"He likes us fine, Rhea." I kiss her ear. "He just gets a little bored, that's all."

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Matt buys some chicken wire from the hardware store and makes a bigger cage.

Houdini's new home is in the living room bay window, which is lower and wider. The girls move their coloring book cut-outs, faded from the sun and curled from being moved, and carefully re-tape them to the bay window. They leave the old tape pieces on their bedroom window, angles of translucent tape that surround cleaner, empty spots.

"I'm going down to the shop for inventory." Matt appears in the bedroom doorway. He's showered and wearing his favorite khaki shorts and T-shirt. I am painstakingly rubbing the tape off the window with adhesive remover.

"I thought you did inventory two weeks ago," I answer, rubbing the window.

"No, that was a shipment," he explains. "The new Treks."

"No, it was inventory," I murmur, as he turns to leave. "So where's she meeting you?"

"Did you say something?" he asks, steps back toward me.

"Try not to be home too late." I rub the spots harder.

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It is after midnight when Matt returns. I pretend to sleep as the bed groans and receives his weight. I wonder when we will revisit this afternoon's conversation. He will not bring it up, and I'm not sure how I will. There are so many things that will happen if we broach this subject. If we do not speak, nothing will change. Perhaps it will end without my intervention. But what if it starts again?

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Houdini still escapes. At nights I have taken to watching. After the girls go to sleep, I bring Houdini's cage into our bedroom. I try to stay awake long enough to watch him escape, to see what mechanism is activated so that I can block this action in the future. Every night I am too tired, and the escape happens while I slumber. Or perhaps he has outwitted me, waiting patiently for me to surrender to unconsciousness.

"I'm going to step on him and kill him," Matt complains one morning when he inadvertently kicks Houdini across the bedroom floor on the way to the bathroom. "You need to leave him in the bay window."

"Hermit crabs don't like sun," Caroline announces at breakfast. "I found it on the Internet."

"Well, I guess we can put him in your playroom," I answer, retrieving a Froot Loop that has escaped from Rhea's bowl. "It's dark when you're not in there."

---

The playroom is a treasure chest of possibilities for the hermit crab. Some mornings he is in the Barbie house; others he is in the Lincoln log cabin. The girls purposely leave toys out the preceding evening and speculate over breakfast where he will be found next.

"Maybe if he has a wife, he won't want to run away," Caroline muses.

"Maybe," I answer.

"Mommy, can we get Houdini a wife?" she presses, leaning across the table and trying to make eye contact with me.

"We're not going to the beach again this summer," I answer. "He'll have to get a wife next summer."

"What if we took him from his wife, Mommy?" Rhea chimes in. "Maybe he misses her."

"Well, I guess we should not have brought him here, then. What if we get Mr. Houdini a wife and then we find out she's already married? What if she misses her husband?"

"How will we know?" Caroline looks horrified. "How can you tell if Mrs. Houdini loves somebody else?"

"She tries to escape," Rhea concludes. They both look at each other, knowing they are on the cusp of something important, but not sure what.

"Look, I'm sick of talking about Houdini." I grab their cereal bowls and head toward the kitchen. "If he wants to leave, then fine. Come on; get your bathing suits on if you want to go up to the pool."

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Matt comes home early today from the shop.

"Get dressed everybody—we're going to dinner." He grabs Caroline and Rhea in each arm, like two sleeping bags, from where they are having a tea party on the lawn, and carries them into the house.

"What's the occasion?" I ask from the doorway of their bedroom, where Matt is pulling little dresses from hangers in the closet.

"No occasion," he answers, shrugging. "I just haven't seen my ladies very much since we came back from vacation."

I don't point out to him that his absence has been his decision. I try not to read too much into this, his sudden surprise. We go to the restaurant that puts on medieval performances—horses and knights prancing around the dirt floor encircled by a suburban audience. We eat turkey drumsticks with our hands but are supplied with wet naps. The girls' eyes light up at the jousting, and I can almost see the dizzying cosmos of wonder that orbits quickly in their minds. I wish I could step in with them, live as the little maidens they dream every night they are, waiting for their princes to come, their hermit crabs to have wives.

"Daddy, can we get a horse?" Caroline invariably asks on the ride home.

"We don't have a big enough yard, honey," he answers. "Maybe when we move out to the country."

"When?"

"In a few years."

"I want to go now," she insists. Matt and I brace for the upcoming tantrum. "Everybody gets what they want but me!"

"Does everybody get ice cream?" Matt asks, pulling into the parking lot of the Dairy Queen.

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When we arrive home, sticky and napkinless, Rhea stands by the French doors, looking out in satisfaction to the night.

"Ice cream good, honey?" I tousle her hair.

"How far is the ocean from here?" she asks.

"Very, very far, Rhea. Why?"

"I put Houdini in the yard. He told me he didn't want to stay here anymore."

"You what?" I feel faint. I grab her hand and we enter the kingdom of crickets in the night. "Where did you put him?"

"Over by the big tree." She yawns.

"When?" I ask, scouring the surrounding area with my eyes.

"After breakfast."

How far could he have gotten? Not very far, I tell myself, remembering Caroline's poker chip math. But he is not visible within a twenty-foot circle of the tree.

"Rhea, that was a very bad thing you did," I scold when we're back in the house. "Mommy is going to have a get a flashlight and look for him."

"I don't want him anymore, Mommy. He doesn't like us."

"What about Caroline?"

"Caroline wants a horse. She doesn't care."

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Later that night I take no chances. If I keep moving, I will not fall asleep. I can cover every inch of the yard slowly, methodically. If I think like a hermit crab, I will find him. I am crying, kneeling in the grass, running my fingers through it in the hopes they will touch upon him, his familiar ridge of shell, his meaty pincher. I pull myself together. The girls cannot see me like this tomorrow, my puffy face and dark eyes. But they will see Houdini again, I promise myself. He cannot escape forever. Before the day breaks, I convince myself, he will be back in his cage, where he belongs.

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patrik



sabine maier

photopaper, 30 x 40 cm

One of six... [Next >>>>](#)



micha what's up



sabine maier

photopaper, 30 x 40 cm

Two of six... [Next >>>>](#)

manu with mirror



sabine maier

photopaper, 30 x 40 cm

Three of six...

# old woman



sabine maier

photopaper, 60 x 80 cm

Four of six... [Next >>>>](#)



# my legs



sabine maier

photopaper, 30 x 40 cm

Five of six... [Next >>>>](#)

me



sabine maier

photopaper, 30 x 40 cm

Six of six... [Restart >>>>](#)

# The Sunset Review

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## The Floured Breadboard Café and Other Abandoned Pursuits by Michelle Panik



She noticed his shoes. Low-tops with a wide band of rubber across the toe, they dangled fifty feet in the air. They were the type of shoes popular with skateboarders, and Moira wondered if this were a clue to his personality. Before, he'd always been barefoot.

There typically wasn't much to amuse Moira when she reached The Doughty Baker near sunrise. Her mornings had changed, though, when this longhaired protestor (with a beard that grew in on the third day) scaled a crane at the corner of Pearl and Turquoise and refused to leave. The crane was for a grocery store's expansion, and the protestor was for animal rights.

Moira didn't know all the details, but a local beach was recently returned to humans after being designated a harbor seal refuge. Growing up, her family would bring houseguests here to watch the seals, then move to the next beach over to swim and lie on the sand. The media identified the protestor as a poli sci grad student, and editorials suggested he had a penchant for animals and a dearth of dissertation research to occupy his summer months. It wasn't until a cameraman came into the café that Moira learned of the protest; the student had scaled the crane before anyone on the ground realized what was happening. And then he took a seat on the metal mesh platform. The waiting had begun.

"Good morning," Moira shouted softly to him.

The student whistled and made two Hawaiian shakas with his hands.

Meaningful conversation at such a distance was difficult, but in one exchange he explained that he rose early for some quiet before reporters and onlookers arrived. Moira could relate; his little stunt had transformed her quiet town into a political spectacle. The traffic congestion was cause for some ire, but she didn't mind her café's boost in business; after people cocked their heads to watch the student, they stopped in to eat and monitor the situation further. Morning business saw the greatest benefit; located east of the crane, The Doughty Baker provided a squint-free view.

Moira had made a routine of taking the student a late-morning snack from her café; that day it was egg salad on Armenian yogurt bread. She delivered the sandwiches to the protestor's friend stationed at the crane's base. He kept one for himself and put the other in a dumbwaiter fashioned out of a beach pail and jump ropes.

"Gonna be a hot one today, huh?" Moira watched the bucket rise.

"Yeah." Brendan was a hefty kid with Thomas Jefferson glasses. That day he wore an "I Love New York" T-shirt. The protestor had several friends who rotated through a watch schedule; Brendan's slot was midnight to noon.

Overhead, the student waved an acknowledgment and Moira wondered if he were as reticent as his friend. Perhaps this was why he'd chosen to protest at such a distance. He grabbed the pail and took out the sandwich. Moira watched him unpeel the tin foil, examine the sandwich and wave his approval. Two news vans had their antennae raised but their crews were nowhere in sight. Spectators on foot and those waiting at red lights, though, caught the exchange and clapped when he took a bite.

While it wasn't her motive, these deliveries of sustenance were great advertising for the café. And they didn't just reach spectators; one of her croissants had been featured in a local news broadcast, its Doughty Baker bag in view a full ten seconds. The café could use the exposure. Most customers mispronounced the name as "The Doughy Baker," their eyes skipping the "t" and the difference between gall and a bread ball. Moira had considered changing the name, entertaining such options as

The Eccentric Doughboy, Bleary-eyed Bakery, and The Floured Breadboard Café—names that patrons could digest easily. Ultimately, she kept the original conceit; she'd scrapped a career as a chemist to open this cafe and wanted that leap of faith acknowledged.

When Moira returned to the café her staff was eager for an update on the student protestor. The first few days had been pregnant with shock, controversy, and counter-protests; on this the eighth day, little had changed. All she could report was, "Brendan's on watch."

The café was busy but running smoothly, so she went in the back to inventory her stock. Partway through the flours one of the waitresses, Kylie, a blond high-schooler with an ear-splitting voice found her and said, "There's a couple women out there, and *wow!*" Her eyes popped to punctuate the word. "I mean, wow, they are, like, talking about a crime."

"Are they jurors?"

Kylie's eyes popped again. "Yes!"

The city's courthouse was three blocks away. Moira split the kitchen's swinging doors to look at the customers.

Kylie pointed to the far corner. "They're over there, in the last booth. But it doesn't matter because the whole place can hear them."

One of the busboys, Rick, shuffled into the kitchen with a bin of dirty dishes. "She's right. All the customers are talking about them."

Moira had never served on a jury; her only time in a courtroom was to observe a relative's case. It was an ordeal she wanted to forget, and yet she was curious about these jurors who could be so forthright. Moira asked the waitress if other patrons appeared irritated.

"No. Everyone's, like, really interested. They're talking about some kid on trial for vandalizing a house. You should go walk by and get the scoop." She grinned.

Moira closed the flour tub and circled the dining room to ask how customers were liking their food. Answers were given with partial attention; clearly they were focused on the jurors. They were older ladies, one in a pink, short-sleeved sweater set and the other a button-down floral print.

Moira asked the women about their meals, and the one in flowers said it was just fine. Then, as if to prove her satisfaction, she picked up a glass and sipped soda through the straw. Perhaps she was following the cues of a witness under oath.

Moira went to the busing station and moved silverware around. With her back turned, she heard one of the women say, "The family got threatening letters in their mailbox weeks before. Remember the one with the swastika?"

Kylie had been mistaken about the offense being simple vandalism; it was a hate crime. Moira also learned that the house wasn't scorched, but completely destroyed. The women continued discussing and debunking evidence, trying to puzzle out if this young defendant had desecrated a Jewish family's home.

"The neighbor reported seeing the kid there," the floral print said.

"No," the sweater countered. "He said he saw someone, but couldn't make a positive identification."

Moira was working the cash register when the jurors came up to pay their bill. Preoccupied with fifteen percent and exact change, their

discussion of the case ceased. Moira wanted to ask what it was like to decide if a person had erred, but like everyone in the café she maintained a silent fascination.



She fixed herself a quick ham-and-cheese croissant for dinner and headed out. The Johnson Correctional Facility permitted Moira to dine with her father but it was a privilege she declined. She had agreed to teach its inmates culinary skills, but would confine her interactions to those with the students as a group. Last quarter, she'd taught Introduction to Pastries; this class was on breads. There were twelve students and three guards.

A fourth guard escorted Moira into the kitchen where the students were waiting behind counters. Her father, Jerome, was in the front row, an arrangement he'd no doubt reached with Security. Jerome got through life with five percent knowledge and ninety-five percent charm, sincere though it might be. He smiled and raised his hand in a small wave; Moira didn't allow her eyes to stop on him any longer than the other students.

She wrote that evening's terms on the blackboard and talked about fresh cake yeast while the students took notes in identical tape-bound notebooks. After demonstrating the recipe's first steps she circulated the room as the inmates, working in pairs, replicated it.

One man, Frankie, crumbled his cake of yeast into a bowl with short, pinching movements. "This is harder than last time." He was thin and tall, with a face like a bloodhound.

Moira agreed. Last week's recipe had used fast-rising yeast. "But this is how restaurants make their bread. You have to master this if you're going to work as a baker."

Frankie grimaced, then motioned for his partner to add the warm water.

These students would move on to Breads II, and there would be more men taking the introductory courses. Moira wondered if she could bring in another instructor to accommodate the demand. They would be turning out graduates who'd get jobs at local hotels and banquet halls; they would be helping people change. Perhaps she could expand the program beyond the incarcerated.

The students' dough was left to rise while Moira demonstrated the correct technique for punching it down. Then she shaped hers into five round loaves, scored and floured and put them in the oven. The students did the same; they were required to make five loaves, one to be graded and the rest for the mess hall.

Moira walked the room again and as she passed her father, he looked at her and asked, "Is this correct?"

It was a request for approval. But she wasn't consulted when he took up with the barmaid, and never asked for forgiveness when she found out.

The dough in his bowl was larger than those of other groups. Moira pressed two fingers into it and their impression remained. She nodded. "Looks ready."

Jerome's partner, a short man with a smile wider than his cheekbones, dumped the ball on the cutting board. "Does Weber's make their loaves like this?"

Moira smiled. "This isn't that type of bread."

Jerome began shaping the first loaf. "Remember when your mother made you peanut butter and jelly on white bread, and you'd insist she cut off the crust?"

Moira peered down at the cutting board. "You need to add more flour," she said, then she moved on to the next group.

Jerome had received twenty months for an attempted jewelry store theft. It was the type of burglary committed with a knit cap and black mask, not brazen armed robbery. But it was illegal, and yet it wasn't his thievery that offended Moira. She took issue with who he'd tried to steal for.

It was a group of twelve who had, albeit indirectly, enrolled Jerome in this culinary class. They sentenced him for attempted burglary of a bracelet; Moira wondered what they said about him over lunch at some café. No doubt they'd branded him lazy and unwilling to work for things. But what would they've said if they'd known about his mistress?



The protestor was shoeless and eating ice cream from a pink-and-white cup when Moira arrived the next morning. She gave her usual wave then wondered how much longer it could go on. Vertigo hadn't bothered him, but would the confined platform make him nutty? Would fall classes force him off the crane and into a lecture hall? The police were summoned when he first mounted the crane, but couldn't do anything unless the shopping center pressed charges. The center's management chose not to, instead releasing a statement saying they hoped for a resolution that would satisfy all parties. Renovation work that required access to the supermarket's roof had been put on hold, and the crew was biding its time with projects within reach—drywall and baseboards. The protestor remained on their piece of heavy machinery, trying to effect change by staying in one place.

Moira grabbed fresh crumpets from the bakery case that she smeared with jam and wrapped in foil. When she went outside, though, she saw that the protestor was sleeping. He lay curled on his side, a blanket with a Native American print covering him and a duffle bag for a pillow. Despite the nap his crowd was no smaller. The scene looked like some distorted zoo, like viewers watching a hibernating bear. Quickly, Moira handed the crumpets to Brendan and hurried back inside.

The interest in the protestor had lengthened The Doughty Baker's meal rushes. Lunchtime, normally hectic from 11:30-1:30, had been protracted into three hours, 30 minutes added to each end. The staff had to work collaboratively to get everyone fed, and Moira was often busing tables, seating patrons, and running orders. She didn't mind; after starting this café three years ago, it was finally beginning to feel natural. From the outset she'd had a small, loyal patronage. Now her customer base was increasing. What did she care if it had taken some kid's blatant cry for attention?

The jurors came in at noon when the rush was waxing, the dining room bulging with hungry customers. Out of turn, Moira gave them a table up front and scratched their name off the list. Kylie took their drink order and Rick dropped off clean silverware.

One of the women opened her menu and mimicked an absent juror. "'But he's just a kid.' Please, she doesn't know what she's talking about. That 'kid' committed arson. Arson, first degree." She was wearing a button-down with birds flying across the polyester.

"They're all like that. He needs to be punished." This day's sweater set was green.

"The question is whether the punishment will stop him from doing it again, or make him so angry he'll do something worse."

"I don't care," she said and buttoned her second sweater. "He's guilty."

They continued airing privileged information, defying their oath and violating another's rights, while patrons listened in astonishment and staff made unnecessary trips past their table. The café's consciousness had shifted from the idealistic student to these scuttlebutting jurors.

When the lunch rush abated, Moira removed bread loaves from brown paper bags and cut them into pieces. Then she gathered her staff.

"These are the assignments from last night. Let me know what you think." They were given scrap paper and pens to grade the loaves.

"Heavier than shortbread," Sam, one of the waiters, said. He was a student at the culinary school Moira had graduated from, and the class standout in panettone and Italian breads. He tossed his uneaten portion in the trash and sampled the next.

"Is this supposed to be sourdough?" A line cook asked.

"They're still learning," Moira said. "You have to rank them against each other, not professionals."

The cook scribbled on his paper. "But when they're out of prison, they'll be compared against everyone else."



Moira's mother phoned that evening with a speciously casual tone, first asking about the café before getting to the reason for her call. Connie did this every week and Moira knew what her mother's real motive was; after the weather forecast and problems with gardening, Connie wanted to ask about Jerome. The strategy annoyed Moira, so instead of telling her about The Doughty Baker's brisk business, she went directly to the class.

"How did he look?" Connie asked, her voice grave.

"Jesus, Mom. He's not terminal."

"I know that," she snapped, more defensive than angry. "But that place isn't good for him, isn't good for anyone. Did he seem O.K.?"

"He's fine," she said, and decided this wasn't untrue. Jerome never told her about prison life, but his behavior must have been good enough to warrant him taking her class.

"You know, he didn't mean to hurt you," Connie said.

She gave a sigh that had become habit since her father had gone away. "Whether or not he meant to, he did. He hurt you, too."

"No," she said slowly. "Marriages aren't perfect. You work through what comes up."

Connie was a special education teacher; what would drive some people to early cynicism only increased her patience. Moira knew her mother assumed the bracelet was for her. Given the situation, it wasn't a strange conclusion. In no way approving of what Jerome had done, Connie figured his actions were rooted in a deeply ensconced feeling of inadequacy. Despite everything Moira said, Connie blamed herself.

"How was your father's bread loaf?"

"C minus." She gave a rundown of her employees' comments, then sighed again. "I really want this to work. I want these men to get jobs." She wondered if they could ever go back to their old lives.

"They *will* get jobs," Connie said. "There's a new hotel going up by the water, I bet they could use some good cooks."

*Culinary chefs*, thought Moira, but didn't correct her. "Maybe." Her tone didn't evoke confidence.

"They will," Connie insisted. "I was thinking your father could get a position at the Grande Colonial. The food is French—does he know how to cook that? He'd be close to home and we could have cheap dinners out!"

Her mother really should know about the barmaid. But Moira couldn't say anything now, so long after the fact. Doing so would be an insult.

Moira found out on the third night of Connie's five-day teacher retreat. She was bringing her father a ham and broccoli quiche, a culinary school assignment that had earned her an A-. Moira knew the grade would outrage him; Jerome never believed she was anything but perfect. Moira had always gotten along well with both parents, but had a better relationship with her father. Connie's hyperbolic fear of judging people made her hard to talk to; when Moira asked about the decision to have sex, Connie would only say it was a choice that deserved serious consideration. She didn't tell her not to do it, but she didn't offer help with a birth control prescription, either. Her father, on the other hand, was as open as an eight-lane highway. Easy to talk to, he was always asking about the minutiae of Moira's life—things most fathers were scared to know. He respected her and trusted her choices; he wasn't upset when she decided lab work wasn't for her. He thought her decision to enter culinary school was a good one.

There was an unfamiliar car in her parents' driveway when Moira pulled up, but she figured it was a repairman. Her father had been complaining about spotty TV reception.

Moira found the two of them in the recliner chair. Jerome tried to explain, but Moira dropped the quiche and was careening down the block before he could get his pants on.

Moira never asked him about it and he didn't broach the topic, choosing instead to invite her on a harbor cruise—a daylong escape while her mother was away for the week; that was how he'd explained it. Moira refused without comment and when Connie returned Moira didn't want to relive what she'd seen in her parents' living room. She never told her mother. Connie was blissfully unaware and Moira thought if she never spoke of it, she might absorb a bit of her naïveté.

Jerome explained the carpet stain as a dropped TV dinner. Dutifully, Connie rented a shampoo machine and removed the stain for three days before it seeped back up from the carpet pad. Moira saw it and knew some things remained even when they were gone. She would never forget the image of that woman on top of her father, the only way to fit two people in a chair designed for one.

The warden had told Moira that by teaching the class she'd provide training to a group of troubled men. She thought maybe this was why she did it; the prospect of healing, of preventing other crimes of family disruption.

Moira returned to the conversation with her mother and told her that the Grande Colonial was a good place to work. "A friend of mine manages their bar and likes it."



"That sounds like something Jerome could work up to."

"Maybe."



The protestor had been on the crane three weeks when Moira arrived one morning and saw him upright and spooling a yo-yo over the platform's ledge. Brendan was awake but still in his sleeping bag, a blanket for a pillow and a pillow over his head. Moira had never seen the yo-yo before.

"Where'd you get that?" She shouted and pointed.

The student looked at himself, then down to the yo-yo. "What?"

Brendan sat up in his sleeping bag to see what they were talking about. Moira spooled an imaginary yo-yo off her middle finger, then retrieved it with a snap. "Where'd you get it?"

"Yo-yo!" he shouted, then proceeded to rock the baby.

Moira guessed the toy was from a spectator. Either that or it was part of a care package hoisted up to help him pass the time. She'd heard about a kid in northern California who'd been living in a tree for months; he went through a Mensa puzzle book every week.

Rather than continue their fledgling conversation, Moira went inside to begin forming and kneading bread dough until it took shape. Having reached the halfway point in the class, her students' enthusiasm was waning. Frankie, the one who looked like Scooby Doo, wondered if the culinary training weren't an elaborate scheme to save money in the cafeteria. Several students talked about signing up for auto repair.

At eleven o'clock, Moira noticed her busboys still hadn't taken their break. She implored them to, but Rick shook his head. "We don't want to miss them."

The jurors' allure had proven stronger than a nicotine habit. As the lunch rush gained momentum, customers Moira had only seen since the jurors began eating there were filling up her tables. Moira gave them soda refills and asked their names.

Two teenage boys sat at the counter, and as Moira cleared their plates one asked the other, "What's a mandatory minimum?"

People might look at the protestor for a couple of minutes, but they'd wait around Moira's café all afternoon for two old women who aired opinions they weren't yet supposed to have. The dining room piqued with earnest expectation. When the jurors hadn't shown by one o'clock, though, Moira knew they weren't coming.

"Maybe it's a federal holiday," Sam the waiter said.

Moira shook her head. "Just another summer day."

And one where a kid was living on a piece of construction equipment. Moira went to the window and looked up, up to this student who'd made himself a focal point to give attention to something bigger. She wondered if his view of what went on below were unobstructed.



The city returned the beach to the seals shortly before Thanksgiving and the student came down in time for a meal with his family. Because his standoff had been featured in the national news and highlighted by environmental groups, the city feared his action would discourage tourism. Then, although the beach was again closed to people, seals were turning up with suspicious injuries. Moira saw a follow-up interview where the student expressed disappointment that victory didn't ensure success. He stopped short of discussing another sit-in.

Their service ended, their case decided, the jurors returned to their husbands, their homes, their volunteer library positions. The defendant got five years for burning down the Jewish family's home. Moira learned this while reading the newspaper one slow morning (after the student came down, business returned to its previous levels). She wondered if the defendant's family felt as failed by him as she was by her father—a man whose legal infraction was minor, but whose offense against his loved ones was as repulsive as a hate crime.

Upon his release Jerome applied for electrician work, a job he'd been doing before his incarceration. If he went back to the barmaid, Moira never caught him. If Connie found out, she kept it from her daughter.

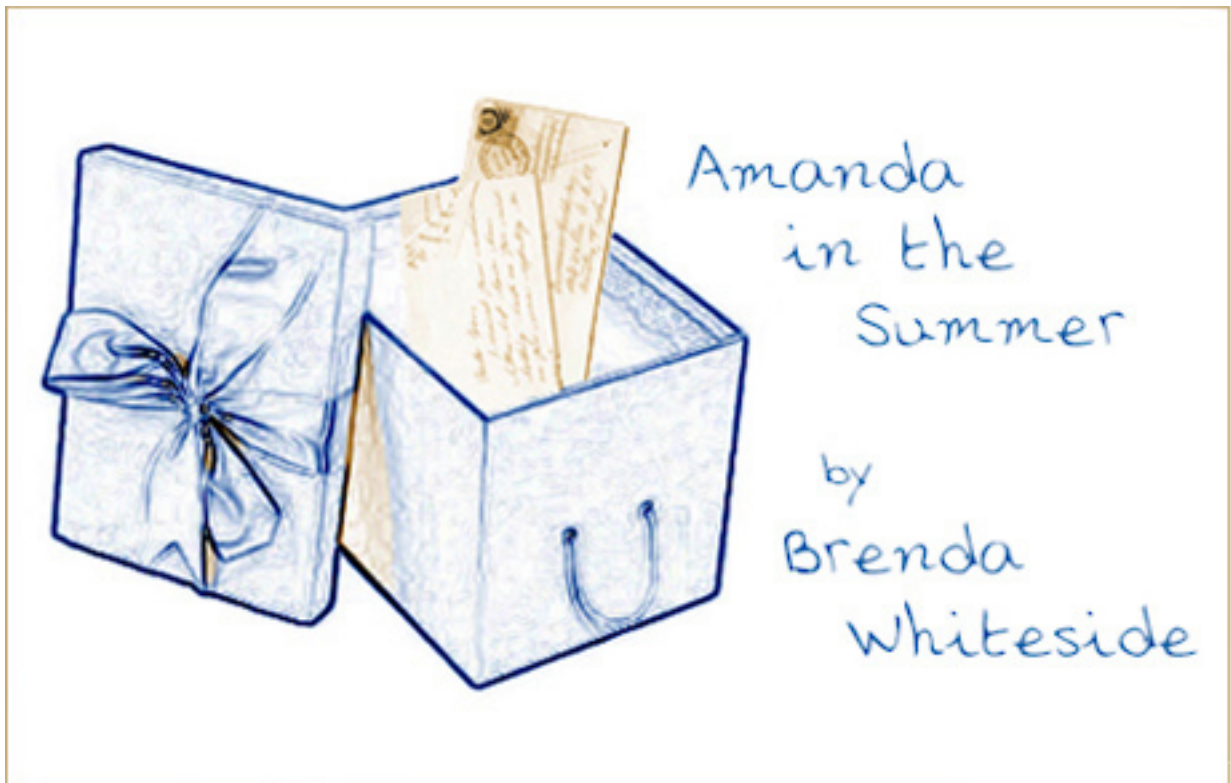
Moira ended the culinary class when her father left, telling the warden she didn't see the value in it. She knew he'd assume the reason was that Jerome would no longer benefit. But that wasn't true. He had never benefited, and anyhow, she had served her time.



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# The Sunset Review



August 5, 1947

Dear Tilly,

It was so wonderful to hear from my best friend, although I should be very upset with you for such a short dissertation. You tell me you saw "Pollack's" as if he has painted only one canvas. More information would have been greatly appreciated for this poor isolated friend. And then you somehow relate the atomic bomb and the direction of the scientific community to the degradation of art into the abstract! I am left hungry for a real debate with you. You were short and bleak. Have pity for me, Tilly, and give me more information.

Perhaps you are sour for having to work the summer while I lie in the sun like a beached whale. Dear Tilly, you are free to touch your toes, drink a Manhattan, and dance till dawn. I, on the other hand, know my toes are swollen even though I can't see them, throw up every day at 2:00, and I am in bed by 9:00 every night. You are working on a budding career while I had to trade my wonderful laboratory job at the university for housewife and mother-to-be.

Oh, and I can hear you now. You need not lecture me. You know perfectly well that I am honestly feeling grand about being preggers. But I could use you here to form a front against Mother. She is silently protesting my lying out in the sun... exposed! I am rather undignified in my "condition." And at night when I sit on the deck, feeling glorious in the ocean breezes, she frets about me catching a "draft."

If there were a phone in this old house, I would call you and have a

good chat. It would pick you right up. But then I know by the time you get this letter, Robert shall have arrived and taken you for a grand lunch. Isn't it a great coincidence he had to go in to the city to handle some pre-registration papers at Columbia? My husband, the ever-thoughtful one, promised he would amuse you at least one day while he was there.

Now back to your morose view of the state of affairs. Maybe it is the beautiful sea or maybe it is Amanda kicking inside of me, but I do not believe the state of America is as depressing as you paint it. Although you do make me think. Perhaps the closing of our little Beach Theatre is a sign of what you are talking about. I am sure you would say Aha! Just look at where America is going! When the sign announcing the last performance was tacked in the window, I was quite stricken, as was Mother. We attended the town meeting to lodge our protests, but money was the only voice heard. It seems the cinema is taking all the business away. I know this is such a small town and really only populated in the summer with us city folks, but still so disappointing. The teeners prefer watching movie stars on the big screen to the locals on the stage. It is a sad statement on the cultural tradition of any community when the theatre falls into decline and abandonment.

Of course I too have concerns about the atomic bomb. I am bringing a child into this world. But I have faith in the scientific community. Unlike you, I was a part of that community and do not see it as a self-involved, self-perpetuating, abstract sterile environment. Which brings us back to Pollack. I don't believe abstract art is a retreat from reality. Isn't it more of a creative response to signify our freedom and liberalism?

Tilly, pack it up and come and visit. This one-sided debate is too difficult. I want you to feel Amanda kick. How do I know it is Amanda and not John I am carrying? I just know. Mother agrees. And no, I have no other name than Amanda picked out. After all, it is a grand tradition. I am Amanda, my mother is Amanda, and my grandmother is Amanda. I wouldn't get into this debate with you if you were here. But since I can have the last word I shall state with conviction and without retort from you that an individual is not determined by whether or not she has her own unique name or shares it with her mother before her. I can guarantee you any name I might come up with will not be unique to this world. And then what? She shares a name with some unknown woman with no history between them, no connection, no pride in tradition! So pooh-pooh tradition all you want. My Amanda will be quite the individual; so much the more with the influence of her mother and her adopted Bohemian spinster Auntie Tilly. Yes, you shall be known as Auntie Tilly, Amanda's spinster Aunt. So sad for Tilly - twenty-four and already a spinster. Perhaps Robert will meet someone at school to introduce you to. Thank God for the G.I. bill. He'll be back at Columbia in September and finish what the war interrupted.

It's time for me to lather on more suntan lotion (one good thing to come out of the war) and start reading. I am going to see what Dr. Benjamin Spock knows about raising Amanda.

Please write soon and tell me about all those wonderful nights dancing until dawn, drinking Manhattans, and teasing all the eligible men of New York. And watch over my handsome husband adrift in the big city!

Love, your friend,  
Amanda

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July 5, 1968

Dear Auntie Tilly,

I tried to call you last night and this morning but I should have known you would be off with one or more of your eccentric friends. My wonderful groovy Auntie Tilly and her eclectic circle of friends! I so needed you here to be on my side against Mom and there you were off on some adventure. Daddy would have been on my side but he had to stay in the city and work. He never has time to come out here with us. Always working so hard in the city. Maybe you will see him. I bet you see him as much as we do. He thinks you're crazy wonderful, but then we all do. Anyway, if you had been here, you would have had to speak your true mind. You are the real thing, not plastic like so many people your age.

It is blissful on this stretch of beach. I guess I am glad Mom shamed me into coming for the Fourth of July. The fireworks have come and gone except the ones Mom is shooting out of her eyes right now from the deck. She is more upset about me moving in with Kevin in August than she was about my arrest last April. And to think if I had not taken part in the protest at Columbia State that day, I would not have met Kevin. We are soul mates.

Did you hear the whole story? Mom was actually relieved I was arrested. She's convinced it saved me from getting shot. I was caught tearing down the fence around the Morning Park Gym. It was a symbol of injustice and prejudice! The halls of higher learning cannot just turn their back on the black community at their back door! Anyway, if I had not been detained so long at the jail I would have been at Hamilton Hall for the sit-in. You know how badly that turned out. Pigs! But once the students were in, it was locked and no one could enter. All I could do was ferry them food for the next seven days. In Mom's eyes, my arrest saved me.

So now the big deal is moving in with Kevin, not to marry. That just isn't my bag. Besides, how can I bring a child into a world of war and assassinations? Of inequality and racist values where individual creativity is suppressed or punished? I know you will understand. You never married and had children. Auntie Tilly, you really must speak to Mom on this. Can you dig it? After all, I am twenty-one and there isn't much she can do about it. Do you think she is more upset knowing there will not be any more Amandas in the line? If the future does improve and I have a child, I wouldn't name her Amanda. My child would be set apart, her own name like Moonshine or CatEyes.

I am heading back to the city tomorrow. I will be staying with Carlie until our (Kevin and me!) apartment is ready in August. I am looking forward to school starting again. I must absorb all the knowledge I can to fight the establishment in academia. Students and minorities must have a voice.

I hope we can get together for lunch and a good rap session before school starts. Kevin and I want to go to the Democratic National Convention for the marches there. I want to tell you all about it. I think I will need you to run interference with Mom. Or not. Maybe she will still be consumed with my living arrangements.

Peace and Love,  
Amanda

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June 7, 2004

Dearest Tilly,

Like my mother and my grandmother before me, I am lying on this

stretch of beach writing a letter that I know you will tuck away in the blue hatbox that sits in the top of the closet in the guestroom of our family beach home. That guestroom was always Aunt Tilly's room to me. Thank you for giving me this box but I do not think I can accept it yet. You will be here again to tuck this letter into it yourself.

You are a sly woman, aren't you? My doubts about motherhood and my determination to name this child anything but Amanda have all melted away. I have spent the morning in the sun, reading the letters to you from Grandmother and Mother, feeling their presence while feeling the presence of the child in me. Past, present, and future.

I now know my activism won't end. My quest for enlightenment cannot be daunted, only complimented. My career may change but this new addition to my life is so much more. And I will name this child Amanda. How smart you are directing me to these letters. You put me back in touch with who I am.

The line of Amandas stretches back to 1882. Did you know that? Rummaging through your hatbox reminded me of a trunk Mother kept in the attic full of keepsakes and letters. Starting at the top of the trunk were flyers from Mother and Dad's protest days, letters from friends and family, drawings and cards I made for them. As I peeled back layers like the bark on an old tree, I exposed the rings of history of the Amandas. You have known three of us but in those three you have seen some of all of us. I can only hope to live up to the name.

That blue hatbox started me on a path of discovery that has revealed so much about Amanda and about you.

The name Amanda is of Latin origin and means love or worthy of love. And then there is Venus, goddess of love. What has Venus to do with all my Amandas? On December 6, 1882, the birth date of my great, great grandmother (the first Amanda) the Venus Transit occurred. The Venus Transit occurs when Venus crosses the sun. I plan to see it tomorrow, right here on this beach. It will be the first time in 122 years. My Amanda is to be born on December 6, the birthday of her great, great, great grandmother. Isn't this all amazing? So you see it is practically a spiritual name.

At first I thought you didn't mean for me to see all that lies in this hatbox. I thought it must have been your memory slipping when you directed me to it. I thought maybe I would write and not mention all that I found. You must have forgotten and did not mean for me to uncover it. But then I realized your mind is as clear and as clever as the day I was born.

My grandmother loved you. That is quite obvious from her letters. And apparently my grandfather loved you, also. That note from him, at the bottom of the box, was a beautiful tribute to you. Such a testimonial of love. All those times you both happened to end up in the city, for so many years – you weren't such a lonely bohemian after all.

You have called me a romantic when you have patted my cheek with affection; you have called me indifferent when my passion has not risen to an occasion. With all the Amandas before me now gone, my grandfather gone, you knew the truths and lies hidden in those letters would lead me down a path of self-discovery as I came to know those women before me. It was more important to you that I make this journey of discovery than for you to keep your secrets. I love you for that.

You can't relinquish ownership of your blue hatbox quite yet. You must make one more trip to the beach house. As soon as you feel strong enough, I will bring you here to lie about and watch my Amanda play in the sand.



Until then – dearest Tilly, groovy Auntie Tilly, clever Aunt Tilly -

With Love,  
Amanda

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# The Sunset Review

## Contributors' Notes



**Renee Carter Hall's** fiction has appeared in various print and online publications, including *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, the anthology *Best Women's Erotica 2002*, and *Anthrolations*. She lives in West Virginia with her husband, their cat, and an assortment of local wildlife, including the occasional raccoon. She welcomes correspondence at [renjef@earthlink.net](mailto:renjef@earthlink.net).

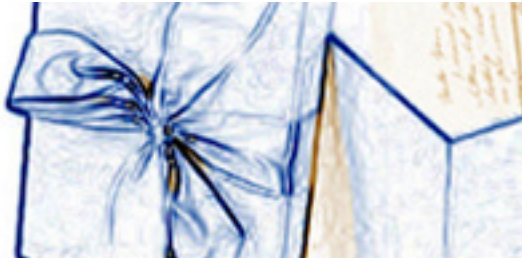
**Sabine Maier** is a film and media artist whose work has appeared internationally in photography and media exhibitions, interactive media installations, streaming projects, audio and video works, and short and experimental films. She lives in Vienna and is the co-founder of [MACHFELD.net](http://MACHFELD.net).



**Jen Michalski** lives in Baltimore. Her fiction has appeared in more than twenty publications, including *McSweeney's*, *Failbetter*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Thieves Jargon*, and *The Potomac*, and her collection of stories, *Close Encounters*, is forthcoming from SoNew Publishing. She is the editor in chief of the online e-zine *JMWW*. Visit it at [JMWW.150m.com](http://JMWW.150m.com).

**Michelle Panik's** fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Stone Table Review* and *SNReview*. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Maryland, and a B.A. in Writing and Art History/Criticism from U.C. San Diego. She lives with her fiancé in San Diego, where she's working on a novel. Write to her at [michpanik@yahoo.com](mailto:michpanik@yahoo.com).





**Brenda Whiteside** lives in Minnesota. Her short stories have appeared in *Skyline Magazine*, *NEWN*, and *Flash Me*, and she is currently working on a second novel. She can be reached at [lolabrenda@aol.com](mailto:lolabrenda@aol.com).

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# The Sunnerset Review

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## Guidelines for Submissions

Writers are invited to submit literary short stories and essays of up to 8,000 words. To get more of an idea of what we are looking for, please read *The Sunnerset Review* or consult our [Recommended Reading List](#).

Email submissions to [editor@sunnersetreview.org](mailto:editor@sunnersetreview.org) as an attachment in MS Word, or as plain text. We suggest you include the word "Submission" in the title of the email, so that we don't mistake it for junk mail. We prefer single-spaced manuscripts in font size 11, but this is not an absolute requirement.

You may alternatively submit in hard-copy by sending to 25 Sunnerset Drive, Smithtown, New York 11787, USA. We prefer disposable copies of manuscripts but this is not an absolute requirement. We can respond via email in lieu of a SASE if you so designate.

All submissions receive replies as quickly as possible. If we have not responded within three months, please hassle us. We read year-round and never go on hiatus.

All submitted work is assumed to be original. Book excerpts will be considered if you believe the work stands alone. Reprints will be considered if the work has not appeared elsewhere within the last two years. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged.

We do not give previously-published authors any more attention than new writers, and judge submissions objectively on literary merit. Even so, a brief note accompanying the submission is preferred. 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 are always interested in knowing how you've heard of us, and what you like about us.

Authors will see drafts of accepted pieces for review prior to release, and will receive twenty-five dollars at release time for their contribution.

Writers retain all rights to use their work elsewhere, however, we reserve the right to republish the material, without modification, in a nonprofit print volume. We also reserve the right to quote brief excerpts of text at literary events, with no connection to monetary gain, crediting the author in all cases.

We have nominated stories annually for various anthologies and awards, including *Pushcart Prize*, *New Stories from the South*, *Creative Nonfiction's Best Of anthology*, *storySouth's Million Writers Award*, *Sundress Publication's Best of the Net*, and others.

# The Sunnerset Review

## Recommended Reading List

Author	Title	Source
Aciman, Andre	Cat's Cradle	From the November 3 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1997
Altschul, Andrew Foster	From A to Z	From Issue #1 of <i>Swink</i> , 2004
Anderson, Dale Gregory	The Girl in the Tree	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Alaska Quarterly Review</i> , 2003
Ashton, Edward	<a href="#">Night Swimmer</a>	Online at <i>The Blue Penny Quarterly</i> , Spring/Summer 1995
Baggott, Julianna	Five	From <i>Other Voices</i> #28, 1998
Bardi, Abby	My Wild Life	From <i>Quarterly West</i> #41, 1995
Baxter, Charles	Snow	From the collection <i>A Relative Stranger</i> , published in 1990
Benson, Amy	Vectors: Arrows of Discontent	A memoir excerpt in Issue 29.2 of <i>New Orleans Review</i> , 2004
Borders, Lisa	Temporary Help	From the Spring/Summer issue of <i>Bananafish</i> , 1998
Brooks, Ben	Wildflowers	From the Spring issue of <i>Georgetown Review</i> , 2005
Broyard, Bliss	<a href="#">Mr. Sweetly Indecent</a>	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 1997
Burns, Carole	Honour's Daughter	From <i>Other Voices</i> #31, 1999
Cain, Chelsea	Pretty Enough To Be a Showgirl	From the Spring issue of <i>Grand Tour</i> , 1997
Cheever, John	The Stories of John Cheever	A collection published in 1980
Christopher, Nicholas	<a href="#">Veronica</a>	A novel published in 1996
Clark, Susan	Besides the Body	From the Spring issue of <i>Red Rock Review</i> , 2004
Coake, Christopher	Solos	A novella from Vol. 9, No. 1 of <i>Five Points</i> , 2005
Crane, Elizabeth	When the Messenger Is Hot	A collection published in 2003
Crowe, Thomas Rain	<a href="#">Firsts</a>	Online at <i>Oyster Boy Review</i> in January, 1997
Dancoff, Judith	Vermeer's Light	From <i>Alaska Quarterly Review's</i> Intimate Voices issue, 1997
Dormanen, Sue	<a href="#">Finishing First</a>	From the Summer issue of <i>Lynx Eye</i> , 1998.
Doyle, Larry	Life Without Leann	From an issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> in Fall, 1990
Hyde, Catherine Ryan	Dancing with Elinor	From the Summer issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 2006
Kennedy, Thomas E.	Kansas City	From Vol 62 No. 4 of <i>New Letters</i> , 1996
McInerney, Jay	Model Behavior	A novel published in 1998
Millhauser, Steven	<a href="#">Enchanted Night</a>	A novella published in 1999
Moses, Jennifer	Circling	From the Spring issue of <i>Gettysburg Review</i> , 1995
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
Orlean, Susan	The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup	A collection of essays published in 2001
Peelle, Lydia	Reasons for and Advantages of Breathing	From No. 87 of <i>One Story</i> , 2007
Perry, Rachael	Sullivan's Inventory	From No. 82/83 of <i>Confrontation</i> , Spring/Summer 2003
Raboteur, Emily	The Eye of Horus	From <i>StoryQuarterly</i> #40, 2004
Robison, Mary	Why Did I Ever?	A novel published in 2001
Row, Jess	The Secrets of Bats	From the Fall issue of <i>Ploughshares</i> , 2000
Russell, Karen	Haunting Olivia	From the June 13 & 20 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 2005
Ryan, Jean	Paradise	From the <i>Massachusetts Review</i> , Autumn 2001
Salinger, J.D.	For Esme - With Love and Squalor	From the collection <i>Nine Stories</i> published in 1953
Tilghman, Christopher	The Way People Run	From the September 9 issue of <i>The New Yorker</i> , 1991

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