

★ **Thirst for Salt****Madelaine Lucas**

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Both luscious and melancholy, Madelaine Lucas's novel sifts through the ashes of a woman's formative romantic relationship, unearthing the truths that she once evaded.

Though her childhood circumstances were somewhat circumscribed, fresh flowers always brightened the narrator's family's spaces. Her single mother was different, but love lived there. Now, just out of college, she agrees to one last mother-daughter summer on Australia's shore.

On the beach, she meets Jude, who is forty-two to her twenty-four—a palindrome, she marvels. At first sneaking away to be with him, she learns that she loves “best in gestures, in metaphors,” even as a voice inside warns her that “metaphors are lies.” Observant, she measures the demands of Jude's lifelong friendships against her own budding wants.

Now, though more than a decade has elapsed since their summer-plus together, Jude's once-lover's memories of him retain an aching quality. She recalls lightning flashing during afternoon disclosures; trysts on the moonlit beach; the judgment of others in grocery store aisles. She remembers beginning adulthood with him too: moving in. Adopting a dog. Edging away from friends to extend her time with Jude, who didn't think that love was about possession, but about the everyday acceptance of mutual desire.

Sensual and electric, the prose pieces together mementos from the couple's time together—a tactile vocabulary of not-forever love. The couple muses through the possibility of parenthood; she observes that a sonogram looks like a blurry “moonscape, or an aerial view of a distant planet.” Their visions clash; he is unflappable, she passionate. Fires rage toward the coast. Seasons change. Regretful—or relieved—she wrangles what might be toward what might-have-been.

The delicious and damning contours of a woman's first, passionate love are excavated in *Thirst for Salt*, a sun-soaked, nostalgic romance.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2023)

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