**JUNE/JULY 2007**



Khaela Maricich

**[FROM THE BLOW]**

“MAYBE BY THE TIME I’M SIXTY, I’LL BE OVER MY LOVE STORIES.”

The stages of Khaela Maricich’s career as a performer:  
*A girl who was just playing the guitar*  
*A girl who was just playing the ukulele*  
*Get the Hell Out of the Way of the Volcano*  
*The Blow*

*A few years ago I was in this very intimidating weeklong screenwriting workshop. Most of the other writers were from L.A. and New York; most of them had made movies. I was from Portland, Oregon, and not only had I not made a movie, I was wearing leg warmers that were made out of sleeves I had cut off of sweaters. Meals were the hardest, walking around with a tray, shyly trying to figure out whom to sit next to. At dinnertime the mail was handed out; most of it seemed to come from people’s agents. One day I got a letter. It was a big envelope from my friend Khaela Maricich. I opened it and slowly pulled out a strange mass of paper. I started unfolding it. And unfolding it. The Hollywood screenwriters began looking up from their conversations to watch me unfold. Eventually I had to stand up because the thing was so long. It was a life-size paper version of Khaela herself. She must have sensed I needed backup. There she was, carefully painted and cut out, one arm punching the air, wearing jeans and a T-shirt that said* temporary version. *Oh and look, the jeans even had a tiny paper pocket. Everyone watched as I reached into the pocket and took out a letter. I sat down and read it with Khaela folded over my arm. This was the official beginning of my confidence that week. There is maybe a myth that freaky-artist types are either total loners or members of packs, scenes. I’ve never been either of these things, but I have two or three friends who are my touchstones. Khaela is one of these. We don’t hang out very often. Sometimes we fight, sometimes it takes hours to warm up to each other, but sooner or later the gates are flung open and everything comes crashing out of our hearts. Our hopes and insecurities become spiritual when she talks about them. If you’ve heard her band the Blow* [*and if you haven’t, you can hear the Rory Phillips remix of “Parentheses,” track 13 on the CD included with this issue*], *then you know what I mean; she’s the same way in her songs. Last time she passed through town we only had time for one conversation. Here it is.*

*—Miranda July*

**I. “ACE INVESTIGATIONS”**

**MIRANDA JULY:** We’re drinking a tea which I didn’t really tell you about. This tea that we’re drinking, it’s really special longevity tea, and so we’re more or less going to live forever. It costs like nine dollars, to live forever.

**KHAELA MARICICH:** It’s like fifty cents a year, or less.

**MJ:** I thought we would trace a little bit of your history for those who aren’t as familiar with it as I am. Also, to be honest, there are some things that happened when I first met you that I don’t understand at all, because we weren’t very good friends. For example, Ace Investigations.

**KM:** [*Laughs*] You never really understood it, huh?

**MJ:** No. So when I met you, in Olympia, because I was dating someone who lived in Olympia and I would come up from Portland and visit, I one time heard that the new thing that you really wanted to be a part of, if you were anyone, was Ace Investigations. And I wasn’t quite sure, like I was never asked to be an Investigator, or Detective, or whatever, but I had deep respect for whatever it was they did.

**KM:** Well, that’s funny, because Ace Investigations was an investigative agency. My friend started it, and the idea was that *everyone* is an investigator, everybody is always investigating something. And that’s what’s interesting about people, is what they’re paying attention to, what they’re investigating. So, really, anybody could be a part of our investigative agency if they wanted to. So, you were welcome to.

**MJ:** I wish I had realized that.

**KM:** We rented a space and had biweekly meetings, the idea being we would each have our own personal investigations and then manage this space so that we could give evidence of the investigations we made. Basically art shows. What’s funny is I remember someone told me [*whispers*], “You know Miranda, who’s been hanging around town? She said she was interested in being an Agent.” Which meant you got an Agent name and an Agent card.

**MJ:** Yeah, I wanted that card.

**KM:** And I remember seeing you at a concert—but I didn’t know you at all, and you were standing there and I was like twenty-one at this point—

**MJ:** And I’m, like, what, twenty-two?

**KM:** Yeah, maybe twenty-one and a half. And you were standing behind me when you had your really big white hair and wore the most mysterious clothes possible. I didn’t understand what you thought you thought you were doing, with your awesome tights *over* your big shoes. I just didn’t understand it [*laughing*]. So I turned around to you at a concert and was like, “Are you spying on me?” Like, giving a clue about Ace Investigations, and you said, “Well, if I was I wouldn’t tell you.” [*Both laugh*] And then I was too scared to offer anything more about the membership card.

**II. “KEEP AWAY FROM THE MOON,  
IT WILL FUCK YOU UP.”**

**MJ:** It took a little while, on both ends. Too many code words and not enough regular words. The first time I ever saw you play music was when you played your ukulele, at some show. It seemed so precarious—you know, girl comes out with a ukulele and you’re like, uh-oh. This could be bad. But it was perfectly pop and emotional and precise and sort of efficient, you know? Not too long and not too short. I had completely misjudged the situation. Now I’ve learned to trust you, more or less. But you’ve kept that precariousness with you, and it seems to be part of what’s really valuable about what you do. Was that called the Blow?

**KM:** No, that might have been just me, or it might have been called Get the Hell Out of the Way of the Volcano.

**MJ:** Get the Hell Out of the Way of the Volcano. In short form, that title would be the Blow, i.e., the blow that comes out of the volcano.

**KM:** Exactly.

**MJ:** And what do you think of as the Blow? Do you even think of it as something that only exists as music? What is the Blow?

**KM:** That’s an interesting question. What’s the Blow?

**MJ:** What’s everything the Blow could be?

**KM:** Oh god, what a challenge you’re throwing down to me, Miranda! [*Laughs*] That’s what’s so good about you, you’re always asking what is the best possible thing this thing could be in the whole world, ever? It should be that, just pushing yourself to make it be that. And I’m kind of resting comfortably and not having to define it specifically, everything it could fantastically be. Well, the Blow was just me, for three releases. But also under that name, the Blow, I’ve done performances. The one that I’m really most proud of was “Blue Sky vs. Night Sky.”

**MJ:** I loved that performance more than anything.

**KM:** Since people didn’t really know me back then, I could just get up and start singing as a girl who just was playing guitar. Which I’m really not great at, so it didn’t seem like it was going to be anything very impressive.

**MJ:** Like you with the ukulele.

**KM:** But now I was performing as a character, I was playing this show as if I was an eighteen-year-old girl who was caught up in a boyfriend that she wasn’t super into.

**MJ:** I remember you coming onstage and saying, very nervously, “This song is for my boyfriend.”

**KM:** And then it continues and it becomes clear that she’s actually in love with a girl she’d been with at camp, she’s staggered by an experience that happened with her.

**MJ:** Did the experience have to do with the moon? I remember there was this message—oh, I get shivers thinking about it—there’s a recorded message that is played backwards, but you sing it.

**KM:** I can explain that. It’s actually a story that I experienced, which is why I feel like it was really easy to tell in the show. Just the experience of, through the grounding of holding somebody’s hand, a girl that I met at one point, really experiencing the vastness of what it is to live and exist and look at everything which is—I’m not even really able to communicate that in words right now in the interview because it sounds—I mean, you can’t get that into words. In the performance the girl gets home from camp and tries to talk to her mom about it, about what she’d heard—for the first time she’d looked at the sky and really *heard* *it*—but her mom is just like, “You can’t talk about it. We don’t want to talk about that. Don’t talk about it.”

So the girl’s waiting for her mom to tell her more about why she’s not supposed to talk about it, and in the investigation of trying to figure out what is wrong about talking about that thing that she heard—she tape-records her mom, and then is trying to hear—there must be some secret message in what her mom’s been saying—so she plays the tape backwards—

**MJ:** And you perform this, you somehow made the exact sound with your mouth of a tape being played backwards—

**KM:** And backwards, the mom is saying, “Keep away from the moon, it will fuck you up, it will fuck you up.” The mom knows all about the vastness of the sky and she is terrified of it. That is really the only place in my life I kind of felt like I was ever actually standing in front of people talking about the weirdness, just of living. That was the Blow. So I did that, and I just played songs and shows and experiments of different kinds of ways of performing and sharing that in front of people.

And then I decided to just try making a couple of pop records because it reaches a lot of people, and you can talk to a lot more than just people who like janky low-fi indie music performance. So the last two records of the Blow has been me and Jona, and in the future I don’t know what. Jona’s mom played “Parentheses” at her wedding.

**MJ:** So you know I drive around and listen to the new record, *Paper Television,* all the time. It’s really amazing being your good friend and then hearing you sing about these things that we talk about sometimes—you know, all my friends should make albums for me to drive around to. And you know, I can’t sing at all. You’ve never heard me sing, really.

**KM:** Once.

**MJ:** OK, but I sing along to you, Khaela. While I’m driving.

**KM:** Ooh!

**MJ:** One thing I sing along to is that part—I think it’s essentially from the point of view of a shit, more or less, passing through a body. What song is that on?

**KM:** “Babay.”

**MJ:** It’s that part where you sing, “I will always be around.” It’s so valiant, like a cry out into the night, “I will always be around! I am *that* big!” And then a moment later, sadly, in retrospect, “because I thought I would always be around.” The realization of impermanence.

**KM:** And I’m straining my voice on that part too, to sing it. I was singing a little bit out of my key. I think it’s in my range now, now that I’ve recorded this record—because I’ve stretched my range a little—but it’s like, “I will always be,” and my voice kind of cracks because I’m not quite there yet.

**MJ:** Yeah, I love that.

**KM:** As we recorded it, and as I wrote it, I felt really sad, and at the end of the day when Jona was playing the beats he’d made and I was singing the thing, I was like, “It’s sad, isn’t it, Jona? Listen, listen how sad.” It felt like it’d gotten it into my hand, though. It was better to have the sad in my hand than running and not being able to catch it.

**MJ:** Yeah, I know. That’s often the place that I’m making things from, like, I can’t stand to feel this way. At least if I can have it in my *hands,* it’s like being sad, but with money.

**KM:** Or the sad is money.

**III. “IF SOMETHING IN THE  
DELI AISLE MAKES YOU CRY…”**

**MJ:** Another beautifully sad lyric on that record is the one that goes, “If something in the deli aisle makes you cry…”

**KM:** What’s funny is that I made that up in my head around you.

**MJ:** Really?

**KM:** Yeah, we were in the Whole Foods, when I was visiting you in Portland one time, and I was staring at the overwhelming mass of all the food, kind of personal but really so impersonal. I had that really overwhelmed feeling; just wanting someone to come up and see that, and see me, and see that they should walk me outside.

**MJ:** Right, but I guess I didn’t walk you outside, did I? That’s not the punch line: you were waiting and then I walked you out? You probably didn’t even tell me.

**KM:** I don’t think I would have taken the risk to expect that from you at that point. I think my eyes were a little watery, and I was like, “Do you ever want someone to walk you out the door? Just put their arm around you and walk you out?”

**MJ:** I was probably like, “Get it together, Khaela!”

**KM:** You were just like, “We need food.”

**MJ:** That’s so funny, because I’ve imagined those two women in the deli aisle. So just say the lyrics so we have it.

**KM:** [*in a normal speaking voice*] If there’s something in the deli aisle that makes you cry / You know I’ll put my arm around you and walk you outside / through the sliding doors / Why would I mind?

**MJ:** OK, but you sing it much less flip. I love the “why would I mind?” part. It implies that someone else is saying “Do you mind doing this for me? Is this OK?” That’s the part that breaks my heart, because it’s very female to feel like that’s too much to ask.

**KM:** Yeah, yeah, totally.

**MJ:** Even in your fantasies there’s an implicit apology. That’s the extra part that you probably don’t even think about, I’m guessing. I don’t, when I’m writing. When people ask me, “Is there a female point of view in your work?” I’m always like, I don’t know. I’m just me, and am I even human? But when I heard that line, I was like, Oh, no guy would have that fantasy of someone saying, “Why would I mind?”

**KM:** It seems like a lot to ask.

**MJ:** Yeah, it’s so much to ask! [*Both laugh*]

**KM:** That’s the first song I ever really felt like I was trying to write from, like, “I love you.” All the other songs I have written on most of those other records are like, “I tried to love you! I’m trying to love you!”

**MJ:** “I’m trying to figure it out! Give me a second!”

OK, here’s a fun one: This is a question about how you look, and how aware of it you are, how much do you control it. I’m only bringing it up because you’re reaching a wider audience. More people are looking at you.

**KM:** That’s the one aspect where I really feel like a dude. I really try, and sometimes I have a brave notion about what I’m going to wear, but really the coolest things I have are things a couple of people have given me, including you.

**MJ:** Nonetheless, you are willing to be up there onstage in front of people. It’s so often tied, a woman in front of her fans, with a *look.* Even on the most indie level. I love Karen O, and I love her *look.* You do have a look, but it’s actually probably very startling to people because—

**KM:** Startling? That’s putting it nice.

**MJ:** I don’t know, I think it’s pretty powerful that you’re up there alone, in front of all these young girls, you’re really smart, you’re clearly the coolest thing in the world and you’re not all dressed up, you’re not wearing make-up, and yet you still want to be seen, you’re a total performer.

**KM:** Really, what that’s about is that I don’t have the attention span to make things any nicer than they are. Any time I’ve tried to wear makeup I just feel like a fool. Really I’m trying to do the thing that’s least embarrassing to me. I try to make sure my hair looks reasonable and put on some clothes that don’t fall off or anything.

**MJ:** OK, I won’t put you through this anymore.

**KM:** No, it’s funny!

**MJ:** I have a lot of love for that part of you.

**KM:** Thanks. I’ve been thinking about wanting to grow my hair a little longer again. I mean, I don’t want to come off like a big lesbian or something.

**MJ:** You have an inherent style that you can just skate on forever.

**KM:** Oh, thanks.

**IV. “IT’S TIME TO HAVE GOOD SEX.”**

**MJ:** But speaking of lesbianism, tell me about your mom’s favorite song on the new record.

**KM:** Oh yeah, well, I thought she would think that the music was too bumpin’ and too fast. So I was really surprised to hear her call me and be like, “I think it’s great, I just really love it, and I just think that French song—I mean, *I don’t know what it’s about,* but I really think that’s just the best one on there—but because it’s in French *I don’t know what it’s about.*” It’s totally about me hearing these girls having sex in the room next door and then hearing, at my other friend’s house, a girl and a guy having bad sex, and the fantasy of going up and taking the girl, knocking on the door, and the girl having the bad sex, just getting her to come, and leave, you know? I mean, basically it’s about… it’s basically about me feeling like it’s time to have good sex, you know, and doing whatever it takes to make that happen [*laughs*].

**MJ:** And on some level, your mom’s really supporting that.

**KM:** She’s really feeling it [*laughs*]. No. It was funny to me that the one song I would have been most afraid she would have not supported—because she hasn’t been the most supportive of me, doing what I need to do to be happy—she loves.

**MJ:** And the song has English lyrics too. Plain as day.

**KM:** I know, I said that, I said, “Mom, it’s actually in English too. All the words are there.” And she was like, “Hmmm. Well.” And I was like, “I actually kinda have to go, because we’re driving in the car right now, Mom,” and she said, “I have a story to tell you! I just have to tell you, my friends who came to the reunion, when we had our class reunion…”and I said, “Ma, I really gotta go, I have to just get in the car and drive,” and she said, “I’m going to tell you this story. There was this woman, she was one of the really pretty girls and she just got married right out of high school, and when we went back to the class reunion…” and I said, “Ugh, I’ve got to go, Mom,” and she was like, “and she came back with a woman, and she just walked right in and they were just a great couple and it was really nice.”

**MJ:** [*Laughing*] Oh, god, you never told me that!

**KM:** I don’t really think it was actually her consciously endorsing anything. I don’t think any of that is conscious, but maybe on some really deep level she’s wanting to try and accept me where I am. She’s got the pulp, she just doesn’t have the conscious thought that it’s OK.

**MJ:** As opposed to you showing up with your girlfriend—a song that does effectively contain the feeling can get into anyone—you can have the feeling yourself, you can try it on.

**KM:** That would be the intent, right? That’s the hope.

**MJ:** I kind of wonder about that sometimes. *Paper Television* has reached more people than your previous albums, and it also happens to be the most radical. The lyrics are love songs and songs of longing, but they turn back on themselves and question themselves and are totally lesbo, and I wonder how much—

**KM:** [*laughs*]

**MJ:** [*laughing*] Do you have a sense of how much people are getting that? Or is it like your mom, where they’re getting it on enough of a level that it’s affecting them?

**KM:** *Punk Planet* reviewed the album and was like, “She just sounds, like, really angry, these songs all sound really angry, like she got dissed by some boy and now she’s swearing off boys forever, and she just has a really cold heart.” Making examples of songs I wrote about girls. I was thinking, *Angry*? These songs sound angry? I think they sound like…

**MJ:** Very vulnerable.

**KM:** And mystically speculative, or something, you know?

**MJ:** Yep, I do.

**V. “YOU HAVE TO HAVE THE  
MOST DELICATE TOUCH  
TO TALK ABOUT WHAT  
THE WORLD IS LIKE.”**

**MJ:** Is there anything you’re not doing that you want to do? Like a dream project?

**KM:** My dream project… Oh, it’s so embarrassing and vulnerable-making! I can’t say specifics about what it would be, of course.

**MJ:** Right, because of theft.

**KM:** The privacy of my own desires.

**MJ:** Oh, right.

**KM:** I don’t even know exactly what it is yet. When you look out at the world, wouldn’t you want to be able to address something gigantic? I would like to be able to talk to people about a little bit more than just my own feelings about relationships.

There’s greater problems to deal with, but that’s so subtle; you have to walk that so delicately to talk about anything bigger. I wouldn’t want to do this as a pop record. I’d like to do it in other formats, because I like to make things with my hands, like the things you have here in your house.

**MJ:** Yes, I have a lot of things in my house that Khaela’s made for me, they’re exquisite. One of them is a beautiful paper light that looks like something that was made in Japan or something. It’s very structural and it’s a working light too; it glows from the inside out. I think it’s a representation of—you made representations of all your friends’ souls?

**KM:** Well, not really their souls, but if the light is what’s good, then the architectural structure surrounding it is the way they are getting their light out.

**MJ:** I’m always aware that the light I own isn’t actually *my* soul. It’s like, who is it? Someone in Olympia?

**KM:** Yeah, I don’t know if it was a specific person.

**MJ:** When you talk about other forms than a pop record, I realize that, yeah, I think of you as an artist, but not everyone knows about the other work. I’ve seen you perform and make objects and paintings, and everything is all of the same caliber. Your album is not better than that light, but it takes so long for everyone to come over to my house and look at it, it’s just easier to make the album.

**KM:** I would like to try fleshing out some ideas on a couple other topics in the span of my life. Maybe by the time I’m sixty, I’ll be over my love stories. I’ll be more and more solid, and I’ll feel able to address the things I find troubling, without doing it in any cheesy way. But it’s a pickle. It freaks me out that people sleep on the street; it freaks me out. And that’s a really deep feeling to me, as deep as how I felt when I realized that I wasn’t going to be able to be with the person that I was in love with, ever. But any kind of venue to communicate about that—you have to have the most delicate touch to talk about what the world is like, to address that at all. You have to be pretty genius to pull it off. So that would be the dream, right? Just to feel more empowered in addressing how the world feels to me beyond the realm of feelings that surround me. I don’t know if it’s possible.

**MJ:** You are already doing that, so I don’t doubt that happening, long before you’re sixty.

**KM:** Yeah, I want to do it, and not just on a record.

**MJ:** Yeah, yeah, got that written down, Universe? She wants that. And not just in record form, by the way—we’re open to other venues!

**KM:** Thank you. This is Miranda, my agent. Thank you for dealing with the universe. Metaphysical agent.

**MJ:** OK, that seems like a good place to stop. Now we can figure out how to talk as friends again.

[Miranda July](http://www.believermag.com/contributors/?read=july,+miranda) writes fiction and makes movies and performances. Her book of short stories, *No One Belongs Here More Than You,* was published in May. She lives in Los Angeles.