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A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain , Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade

Christopher Benfey

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The country's most noted writers, poets, and artists converge at a singular moment in American life

At the close of the Civil War, the lives of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade intersected in an intricate map of friendship, family, and romance that marked a milestone in the development of American art and literature. Using the image of a flitting hummingbird as a metaphor for the gossamer strands that connect these larger-than-life personalities, Christopher Benfey re-creates the summer of 1882, the summer when Mabel Louise Todd-the protégé to the painter Heade-confesses her love for Emily Dickinson's brother, Austin, and the players suddenly find themselves caught in the crossfire between the Calvinist world of decorum, restraint, and judgment and a new, unconventional world in which nature prevails and freedom is all.

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