

Selection from

***Pretty*, by Kim Chinquee**

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Founded in 1996 by Robert Alexander, the Marie Alexander Poetry Series is dedicated to promoting the appreciation, enjoyment, and understanding of American prose poetry. An imprint of White Pine Press since 2001, the Series publishes one to two books annually. It is our mission to publish the very best contemporary prose poetry and to carry the rich tradition of this hybrid form on into the 21st century.

Big Cages

She sleeps with the tiger. She rests on his shoulder and touches his fur. He is meaty and gentle, with big teeth he only shows with a yawn. She wakes from a dream and feels the tiger's paw on her arm, and she wonders if there is a boy, her boy, in the next room. Not really a boy now. A man with a stuffed bear, and the bear is getting up to use the bathroom. She looks at her husband—in her dream there is Discovery, that mirage, the circus, tigers in big cages, a man, a bear, a trapeze artist. She hears flushing from the bathroom. She starts to get up to check if the bear is real and is her son a boy or man now? She moves closer to her husband. She pulls herself under him, like a blanket, hearing his heart thump evenly.

No One Was With Him

He had his own business and let himself off at five, like a regular employee, and every day afterwards he called her, and today when she asked him how his day was he said fine except for the accident. She said what accident. He'd rolled his truck a few times. She said are you okay and he was fine, so he said he was perfectly fine. His truck was probably totaled, so he said that, and he wouldn't find out for sure until the weekend. She asked if he was scared and he didn't have time to be scared, so he told her that, and she said, but weren't you? Like, didn't you have a moment of freakiness and he said no. He'd slipped his truck on ice, whirling and spinning, rolling one, two, he wasn't sure how many times, so he told her that. She said was your brother with you? Maybe your new puppy? No, Hun. No one was with him. Someone called 911, and she kept asking him more questions, like what now? and what if? and he felt fine, so he told her he was fine, he said he was perfectly fine, and she asked more questions and he heard something like some ripping, and he said are you okay? He pictured her bedraggled, her hair a mess, her naked, asking him again will you ever touch me, will you again ever, and will you, will you, will you? ever, do you love me? She said please and are you sure that you're okay and he said he was fine, Hun, he was perfectly fine, Hun, he was perfectly fine with everything.

Heifer

I was in my shorts and halter top with my Holstein, Tootles. My father gave her to me right after she was born. On her certificate, I was listed as the owner.

The breeder had put a seed inside her. I liked the breeder's son—he left notes in my desk along with squares of Hubba Bubba. In our notes, we debated names for Tootles' offspring. We came up with Twinkles, Twix, and Tootsie.

I'd tied her to a pole. I was brushing her. She'd be going to the fair, where I would lead her in a coliseum, and a judge would rate her legs and spine and posture, and she'd get a blueredwhitepink ribbon, all depending. Last year she got a red for body structure, but a pink for showmanship, which was mostly my fault.

She grunted. "It's okay," I said. I saw a hint of red coming from her muzzle.

My grandfather worked for the Grain Elevator, and I saw him coming over, still in his dusty overalls. His legs moved like a caterpillar, inching. He was tall, and he reminded me of Slinky.

He used to live in the house where I was living. He used to have my bedroom. He had owned it. Now my grandpa lived in a trailer with his wife in a small town called Pulaski.

"Hi, Grandpa Jeans," I said. He sat on a gigantic stone behind me.

He asked me where my dad was. He was hay-baling with my mother. I told my grandfather I didn't know where my dad was. I wasn't sure why I lied.

"Where's Bethie?" he said. My younger twin.

"A 4-H thing," I said. We were the You-Better-Get-Em Getters. He found a brush and started on Tootles. I told him that I thought she had a nosebleed. I told him to be careful, but he said it was nothing. He brushed her hard and fierce-like. "Please?" I said. She grunted. I saw red coming from her muzzle.

Fetching

The babies' parents worked in the same hospital—the women worked day shift, the men worked nights. They all seemed like friends.

On her free afternoon at home, she settled the two babies on the bed, and she went to the kitchen to fetch a lime. The other woman was pregnant again and in the ICU with complications. They all worked hospital rounds, so they could see her when they wanted.

She sat there with the lime, watching the babies roll around. It was a waterbed. She'd found her husband with another woman on that bed.

She changed the babies, picked them up and spun them, one on each hip, the lime in her drink. There was no air and all of them were sweaty. She told both of them their fathers were leeches and they all laughed and cooed together. She took the lime out, threw the thing away, and she blew on their faces.

They looked at her, the babies back on the bed, their faces angling. They kind of looked alike. After their shifts, the men would not come home. She already knew. She'd get up in the morning, putting on her face and changing babies, bathing them and making silly noises, and she'd take them to the sitter, maybe passing her husband on his way in. Before her shift, she'd spill every little secret to her friend, who would not hear, sick in the ICU. And before heading to her shift, where she'd draw blood from geriatric patients, she'd go into a bathroom and look into a mirror, turning from one side to the other. She'd think of her friend who might die, and she'd put on another coat of lipstick, hoping to be pretty enough for anything.