

Selection from

***Magdalena: Prose Poems*, by Maureen Gibbon**

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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.

Un Bruit Qui Court

On the island, women are moored like boats.

In late summer the grass and ground vines of the island have dried. Crickets rub their wings together and all day long the brush on the side of the road ticks and scratches in the heat. Men have returned from the morning catch to sit at their dinners. Voices and the sound of knives and forks on plates come through the closed shutters of the island houses.

In the harbor the women wait. They are tied to logs sunken in the shore-bottom or to metal rings along the stone sea wall of the port. The paint on the boats is scorched, hot to the touch. It peels away in layers. These are small boats, skiffs, large enough for only one or two men. Fish swim beneath the boats in cool shadows.

The men do not understand that their women are moored boats. One side bakes and dries in the sun and the men know it is for carrying and ferrying, but the underside is a blue world they do not know how to see or harvest. Sometimes a plank of wood splits in one of the boats because of the heat. The sound is sharp, like a handclap, but has a small cry or screech in it, too. And there is the plank, split in two. The men can do that with their heat, make a woman cry out. She may also split silently so that you would never know.

Blue Dress

I look like my mother when I wear the dress. I don't know why I say that—there aren't any pictures of her in a cornflower blue dress with white dots, and it isn't the kind of dress she wore. Just saying *polka dots* makes me feel silly, but I feel beautiful and somehow womanly in the dress.

Maybe that's what it is: the dress makes me a woman I never thought I'd be, older and flirtatious, someone who wears stockings and rouge, who sits a long time at a kitchen table, drinking coffee and remembering. The dress bares so much of me—the shy skin at my shoulders, the light hair of my forearms, all the veins rising and crossing under the skin of my wrist. When I wear the dress, I can imagine my arms wrapped around a man's shoulders, my hands at the nape of his neck, my own waist tightly held. I think about the words *in my arms* and can almost feel it, as if the words themselves were touch, the way imagining brings feeling.

It's hard to explain what it means to see my own arms and hands change after so many years of being young. I remember touching the backs of my mother's hands when I was little. I thought they were cool beneath my fingers, smoother than my sticky girl's hands. "No," my mother said. "Your hands are softer. I used to nibble you when you were a baby, just to have your skin in my mouth."

My hands are beginning to look like hers. The veins show easily and my knuckles are starting to look bony. The skin doesn't give as much and seems thin. I know it means I'm aging, but it comforts me. It's like wearing my mother's old turquoise and pearl bracelet, or her engagement ring, reset with a blue stone for my birthday. Sometimes when I think of my mother I wonder how long she will live. My hands seem so small when I think of that.

Magdalena Remembering

When I was young my body was money. I bought what I thought would please me. I would have married a man who kissed the fine fan of bones in my foot. I squandered my pretty breasts and thighs, looking for him.

I never slept beside those men. I sat on their laps and pulled kisses from their mouths—but I never did sleep. Never dreamed. I couldn't let them see that in me: my pictures of red flowers, scented lakes, damask, orange trees. In dreams I breathed water. In dreams I flew.

After a man left I'd stand a long time in front of the mirror, brushing my hair. Thinking.

My belly's empty and I want something sweet.
My belly's empty and I want something salt.
My belly's empty and I want a bitter thing.

Somewhere there is a bird like my soul.

Dorsoduro

For the sake of the story, say it was the morning after you first kissed me.

I walked to the alimentari with Carol to buy tomatoes, the small bells that I liked to eat one after another, like cherries. I loved their sharp, red sweetness, loved them best when we bought them from the boats that stopped in the quarter.

Carol liked you too, so I couldn't tell her we had kissed. I kept thinking of that secret, and of certain words I knew. Anisetta, liquirizia, finnochio—seeds and oils that cleaned and then lingered on the tongue. The words felt good in my mouth, nestled on my tongue. I liked having them there against my lips, just as I liked to kiss the smooth skin of the bells before I bit—

I wanted to think of your kisses that day, and words the mouth remembered.