

a selection from

*Letdown*

by Sonia Greenfield

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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, 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.*

4.

I want to describe it, to tell the whole story, but the birthing suite and its muted walls were details lost in rage. And the Joni Mitchell I played—the candy of her voice—could not be heard over my retching. That all the ways I thought I had prepared were like closing a sliding door on a tsunami. That I couldn't listen to myself whimper anymore, the anesthesiologist floating to me like a goddess in institutional blue while I leaned over, trembling, as the thick, blissful needle slipped deep into my back while I hugged the ball of you.

How this is the point where *what was* should overlay on top of *what should have been*. That your heart decelerated, machines binged, and your father fetched the nurse. That nurses and doctor rocked my dead legs back and forth to dislodge you. That I had to push you out before full dilation, my cervix tearing. And the doctor was stitching for so long. And you, glistening violet, looked me in the face. And the minute you latched on, I became remade in your image. That I would have liked to do it again. But by the time it was possible, I couldn't.

5.

I can't help but make symbols of them. In the Hall of Birds, for example, we walk the glass walls of wings pinned in static flight, a vole dripping from the mouth of the barn owl, but I'm looking at the common kind for reference. In the backyard, it must have been a nuthatch nest laid to waste the morning I woke to what sounded like a crying dog. It was a blue jay marauding with a shriek, and she left with claws full when all week prior another sat in that camellia's crown, tending what hatched.

Or at our cabin, where I carried you through those late winter months, tracking the mating pair of geese. In the dark, after the hatching, they honked their horns of distress while I birthed a boy in sterile light, at three in the morning, in the wing of a hospital. Then the smell of my own blood lingered for weeks as I counted down the goslings to zero. Back at our cabin in the woods, you bawling as the sun tiptoed into the hollow. It must have been a red-breasted sapsucker that played the metal gutters every dawn, hammering my fatigue home until I begged your father to kill it. The bird's machine-gun report answered by shotgun. That resonance still traveling as the crow flies.

22.

Joy is pocket-sized. Like quarter rides. We could ignore the patina of grime on the pagodas in Chinatown where dusk dropped wet against the steamed window of the dumpling shop, which was one bead on a string that went herb shop, gold Buddha shop, bonsai shop, repeat, until pinwheels in the pinwheel store turned to the breeze and you said, *Bye, wind*, then blew kisses I tried to catch.

I carried pockets so full of quarters we jingled as we headed past the koi fountain teeming with ghost fish, past the old smoking man, past lanterns sunburned red to pink to the plaza where paint-flecked rides bucked against the gloom, and we paid again and again until the mechanical frog churned and galloped you all the way past believing we would ever find ourselves empty-handed.

23.

*EEG Creation Date: 15:29:39, Aug. 23, 2012.* I think the brain is rivers of electricity, is cities of electricity, that it looks like a metropolis from an airplane. Your electricity is learning new routes, like how to work around *gliosis*. Little scars. Little scares. Your EEG is a paper of squiggly lines, a code, each line telling the story of impulses, some lines quivering with uncertainty. In the office I said, *Look, now you get to become a robot*, as the tech gelled wires to your head. I said, *Look, you are a handsome sheik who must be still*, with a white sheet wrapped around multicolored wires plugged into a silver box with a heavy cord leading to a computer that wrote thirty-one lines about your brain. I said, *Look, the computer just wrote a poem about your legs and how they have a mind of their own*. I said, *Let's beep like robots*. I said, *Don't move now*. I said, *Okay, tell me how old you are again*. You said, *Free*. That's right. Free.

61.

All those years adrift in our spaceship with its weird silvery angles and odd pinging, but now this therapy office where we have landed feels a little like your home planet. How good it is to be surrounded by creatures who look just like jostling boys drawing math figures onto the air as if it were a plane of paper and their fingers were markers made of magic. When the front door to this lobby closes with a quiet click, you twitch your way in and grab a wand from your pocket. Well, not a wand, really, but a stick of lightning to trace constellations on the ceiling. Well, not a stick either, to be honest, but a mind that makes these things out of dendrites and synapses while the rest of us from the duller part of earth act like we're the clever ones.