

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Sonia Greenfield: Letdown

Sonia Greenfield · Wednesday, August 31st, 2016

Letdown is an unpublished manuscript looking for its publishing home. These four prose poems are excerpted from the book, which is made up entirely of similarly formatted pieces. The book explored my struggle and ultimate failure to conceive a second child while at the same time dealing with my young son's ASD diagnosis and all of its accompanying complexities. In fact, this project is meant to address what it means for me to be a mother: that the regular joys motherhood brings are in direct proportion to the fear I live with as the parent of an only child, one who has regularly terrified and astounded us with his mortality and beauty, respectively.

4.

If I had to describe it, I would tell the whole story. That the birthing suite and its muted walls were details lost in rage. That the Joni Mitchell I played—the candy of her voice—could not be heard over my retching. That all of the ways I thought I had prepared were like closing a slider 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.

That 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 torn. That the doctor was stitching for so long. That you, glistening and a little purple, would look me in the face. That the minute you latched on, I became remade in your image. That I would have liked to do it again. That by the time it was possible, I couldn't.

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19.

They found the body of the non-verbal boy in the East River. He was obsessed with subways. They say you all love trains.

Twice today we rode the rails on a miniature train going nowhere through tunnels, everything scaled down so we straddled the passenger car of a steamer smaller than a Fiat. We chuffed near a three-tree grove of pomelos, past a water wheel lifting toy troughs to the sky, through a ghost town—stained-glass church and courthouse haunted by skeletons the size of your hand.

Back again by delicate ginger boys shunting something like love with their scrappy Santa Fes. Too old for this, they tinker with their engines and avoid eye contact as if I might glance our future there. All around toddlers in engineer overalls swarm like ants to sugar, winter's sun gilding cowlicks copper and gold.

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23.

In the great green room what he said can't be taken back while a telephone listens to her panic

attack. A red balloon lost its joie and went slack; the cow jumping the moon hid the wall's deep crack. Three little bears with nonretractile claws are sitting on chairs feeding carnivorous maws. Two little kittens are stained with bird's blood; mittens remind you of a sled named "Rosebud." A little toy house is silent with abuse; a young mouse is the green wall's recluse. A comb has teeth and a brush is bristled; a bowl full of mush is choked with gristle. A quiet old lady, deaf, daft, and bent is whispering hush in a thick accent. Goodnight room, fraught with despair. Goodnight moon and your pale, sallow glare. Goodnight fake cow jumping a phony moon. Goodnight broken light and deflated balloon. Goodnight vicious bears. Goodnight rickety chairs. Goodnight kittens snacking on a yellow bird. Goodnight mittens or regret in other words. Goodnight clocks stealing youth with every hour. Goodnight socks with holes to the fourth power. Goodnight little house with restraining orders. Goodnight mouse with a family full of hoarders. Goodnight sharp comb, goodnight bristly brush. Goodnight nobody, goodnight gristled mush. And goodnight senile spinster whispering hush. Goodbye stars, so long air. Farewell noises everywhere.

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34.

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*. Your EEG read is a paper of squiggly lines, a code, each line telling the story of impulses, some lines quiver 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 sheikh who must be still* in your white turban wrapped around multicolored lines 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 okay, tell me how old you are again. You said *Free*. That's right. Free. I said *don't move now*.

Photograph of Sonia Greenfield by Alexis Rhone Fancher.

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