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Chelsea Rathburn

MY HOME IN GEORGIA

In the blurred months after the birth, the pair of us locked
in an unbreakable embrace, I rocked
and soothed and hummed, and still my daughter screamed
into my face, unless she nursed or dreamed,
or I played “(Sittin’ on) the Dock of the Bay.”

I swear, she’d freeze red-faced at the lapping waves
and the first chords, then Otis Redding’s timeless
tender voice. Again and again, I’d play it,
in her room, in the car, all across Georgia,
and not only because it paused her cries.

I played it and felt that I’d been recognized.

I don’t know what my baby listened for—
perhaps the swelling horns, the tide, or how
his words rolled out and in, the changed refrain—
but for me it was the mix of beauty and pain
in Redding’s voice, at once joyous and wistful.

I listened and remembered, then and now,
that any cry could be turned into a whistle.