

ZOÉ STRECKER

On Your Childhood

Neighbor widow with forearms like sledges
tosses stale bread into the courtyard. Goats
come skidding round the corner, hooves

cloving open on the cobbles. She leans
a shoulder in the iron gate, traps them at the ribs
one by one—slam, bleat, slam, bleat—

drops the dimpled tin pot below hairy udders,
pulls fast with fingers thick as ginseng root.
The milk screams in and froths. She eases open

the gate until they scamper forward to the crusts.
Next doe snagged. Let the stinking billy through—
Sto kalo! Every evening she milks by the taut laundry—

underthings discreet in the middle line,
like colors lapped against the fugitive dyes,
clothespins whittled from hickory plugs—

while you steal into your own shed to a place
no one knows but the hen who lays the egg
and the watch dog Mourgo who sometimes beats you

to it. Your hand plumbs the dark nest while
the widow hums minor key ballads of a shepherdess
on the mountain and her blond true love. She

winks at the egg in your hand you will trade
at the store of the taxi driver's wife for a stick
of gum to snap in time to the twig you drag

on the dust covered rocks as you skip
to the fields with lunch for your brothers,

wine for your uncles, an apple for the ox.

loaves and raw onions

for the men in the rye

loaves and raw onions

for the men in the rye

cold pouch of water

a log in your eye

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ABOUT ZOÉ STRECKER

Zoé Strecker is a visual artist and writer of essays, fiction, and poetry. Her work has been published in a variety of journals as well as in *Through the Gap: An Anthology of Contemporary Kentucky Poetry* (Lexington Press 1990). She is the founder of Wild Places Creative, an organization that pursues an array of art projects connecting people to wilderness in fresh ways. She also serves as the visual and performing arts section editor for *Cogent OA: Arts and Humanities*. An assistant professor of studio art at Transylvania University, she lives in Kentucky.

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