

Without Regret

By Eleanor Wilner

Nights, by the light of whatever would burn:
tallow, tinder and the silken rope
of wick that burns slow, slow
we wove the baskets from the long gold strands
of wheat that were another silk: worm soul
spun the one, yellow seed in the dark soil, the other.

The fields lay fallow, swollen with frost,
expectant winter. Mud clung to the edges
of our gowns; we had hung back like shadows
on the walls of trees and watched. In the little circles
that our tapers threw, murdered men rose red
in their clanging armor, muttered
words that bled through the bars
of iron masks: *the lord*
who sold us to the glory fields, lied.

Trumpets without tongues, we wove lilies
into the baskets. When they asked us
what we meant by these, we'd say "mary, mary"
and be still. We lined the baskets on the sill
in the barn, where it is always dusk
and the cows smell sweet. Now the snow

sifts through the trees, dismembered
lace, the white dust of angels, angels.
And the ringing of keys that hang
in bunches at our waists, and the sound of silk
whispering, whispering.
There is nothing in the high windows
but swirling snow,

the glittering milk of winter.
The halls grow chill. The candles flicker.
Let them wait who will and think what they want.
The lord has gone with the hunt, and the snow,
the snow grows thicker. Well he will keep
till spring thaw comes. Head, hand, and heart—
baskets of wicker, baskets of straw.

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Poet, critic, and translator Eleanor Wilner was born in Ohio, and attended Goucher College and Johns Hopkins University. She was the editor of *The American Poetry Review*, and has taught at many universities, including Smith College and Warren Wilson College. In her poetry, she often writes of myth and memory, with what has been called a “mythical impulse.” She avoids confessional writing, choosing instead to invoke themes of mythology, and reinvigorate them in a modern context, especially with dense historical and contemporary allusions. Her poems reflect her wide-ranging intelligence and her commitment to peace and justice.

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