She Wore the Sun in her Periwinkle-Blue Eyes

It seems only yesterday
I was squatting on this stool
as if pushing a huge boulder
from a hill, bearing down,
someone wiping my hair
twisted ropes of black
mixed with sweat and tears,
streaming down my face.

Then, seven days barely passed,
a midwife's bare foot pushing
into my groin, pulling my left hand
then the right, flushing me clean
to be a wife again.

Year after year, year after year
it seemed, till one day I left
the key hanging down the back of my clothes.

Take it off my man said, his
fumbling fingers touching
the hard metal.

Tomorrow I answered, the key digging
into my flesh, each knot on the string
hard as a bead as he mounted me.

Tomorrow I would say to myself
the next morning, tightening each
knot in the worn-out string, hiding
it again inside my clothes.

Then one day there was no need
to take it off. No need to put
the amber bead between my breasts.
I took the bearing stool into the shed,
to sit on while milking
the goats.
Where has the wreath gone he
gave me that one spring morning?
Come with me he whispered, to fetch back the May.

And he nailed the wreath of wild
thyme, tufted with periwinkle
to the door of my parents' home.
A year later I took it with me,
hung it on my own cottage door.

In May donkeys mate people said
shrugging their shoulders,
but I didn't care.

Now the amber bead hangs above
the clay pot of thyme sitting on
the window sill. Early each Sunday
morning, when the sun looks through the
amber, I take it off the nail
into the good room where the half-blind
mirror stands and I let the bead swing
between my breasts, the amber touching
each nipple like a golden drop
of Hymettus honey. I feel the nuzzling
of a baby's mouth, my breasts swell
with thick, rich milk, a sweet pain
spreading, gripping my womb.
Sometimes I pray for the mouths
for which there was no need
to wear the amber bead.
Last summer I saw a foreign lady
walking past our cottage in high heels.
She was wearing the sun in her periwinkle-blue eyes.
She waved to me, pointing to
the amber bead hanging
in my window, then she touched her
own five long strands of amber swinging,
reaching down to her waist.

She hurried toward a dark-eyed
man waiting down the road, holding
a sprig of wild thyme in his hand.

Lady, tonight I shall take down
the amber bead, wear it to adorn
my dress when my man comes home.

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Based on Greek peasant remedies and customs:

Births are often performed in a sitting position in a chair cut away at the seat.

A week after the birth the midwife presses the vulva of the woman with her foot, pulling each hand in turn, then a vaginal douche is given her. Intercourse can then be resumed.

An amber bead hung around the neck of a pregnant woman insures a plentiful supply of milk.

A key is hung in the back of the clothes to stop lactation.

Wreaths of flowers are hung by young men on the doors of their sweethearts whom they want to woo.

Wild thyme blossoming in May produces the Hymettus honey.

_lala heine-koehn_