

2017

Baskey Lady

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Recommended Citation

Millman, Ilene (2017) "Baskey Lady," *PoemMemoirStory*. Vol. 16, Article 19.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/pms/vol16/iss2017/19>

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Ilene Millman

BASKET LADY

Ida Jefferson Wilson is credited with erecting the first sweet grass basket stand on Charleston's Highway 17 in the early 1930's. She was living in one of the former slave quarters at Boone Hall, working as a sharecropper picking strawberries.

Your fingers dance—
Nimble as a low-country fiddler
you splice coils of bundled sweet grass,
weaving silence, songs
metaphor,
 all your fingers
 both hands
your knees.
 Circle go out
 and out
 and out again
pull, gather, bind,
 stitch words into water
close to the bone.
Water held in a basket—
 an old story
 you sew and pass to other hands
so it goes on telling itself: purple sweet grass
bulrush, palmetto frond
ties that bind
you to do something
 a shade more
 than what you've been led to believe,
that which you most immediately are not.
 Never saying much before,
 you circle around the husk

of the old from which you've come,
hang your baskets on a ladder-back chair
out there, beside the highway.