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## Night Sky

Louise Erdrich

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## *Night Sky*

### I

Arcturus, the bear driver,  
shines on the leash of hunting dogs.  
Do you remember how the woman becomes a bear  
because her husband has run in sadness  
to the forest of stars?

She soaks the bear hide  
until it softens to fit her body.  
She ties the skinning boards over her heart.  
She goes out, digs stumps,  
smashes trees to test her power,  
then breaks into a dead run  
and hits the sky like a truck.

We are watching the moon  
when this bear woman pulls herself  
arm over arm into the tree of heaven.  
We see her shadow clasp the one rusted fruit.  
Her thick paw swings. The world dims.  
We are alone here on earth  
with the ragged breath of our children  
coming and going in the old wool blankets.

### II

Does she ever find him?  
The sky is full of pits and snagged deadfalls.  
She sleeps in shelters he's made of jackpine,  
eats the little black bones  
of birds he's roasted in cookfires.  
She even sees him once  
bending to drink from his own lips  
in the river of starlight.

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The truth is she cannot approach him  
in the torn face and fur  
stinking of shit and leather.  
She is a real bear now,  
licking bees from her paws, plunging  
her snout in anthills,  
rolling mad in the sour valleys  
of skunk cabbage!

## III

He knows she is there,  
eyeing him steadily from the hornbeam  
as she used to across the table.  
He asks for strength  
to leave his body at the river,  
to leave it cradled in its sad arms  
while he wanders in oiled muscles,  
bear heft, shag, and acorn fat.  
He goes to her, heading  
for the open,  
the breaking moon.

## IV

Simple  
to tear free  
stripped and shining  
to ride through crossed firs

*Louise Erdrich*