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## Captivity

Louise Erdrich

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## Captivity

*He (my captor) gave me a bisquit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him.*

—from the narrative of the captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, who was taken prisoner by the Wampanoag when Lancaster, Massachusetts, was destroyed, in the year 1676

The stream was swift, and so cold  
I thought I would be sliced in two.  
But he dragged me from the flood  
by the ends of my hair.  
I had grown to recognize his face.  
I could distinguish it from the others.  
There were times I feared I understood  
his language, which was not human,  
and I knelt to pray for strength.

We were pursued! By God's agents  
or pitch devils I did not know.  
Only that we must march.  
Their guns were loaded with swan shot.  
I could not suckle and my child's wail  
put them in danger.  
He had a woman  
with teeth black and glittering.  
She fed the child milk of acorns.  
The forest closed, the light deepened.

I told myself that I would starve  
before I took food from his hands  
but I did not starve.  
One night  
he killed a deer with a young one in her  
and gave me to eat of the fawn.  
It was so tender,  
the bones like the stems of flowers,  
that I followed where he took me.  
The night was thick. He cut the cord  
that bound me to the tree.

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After that the birds mocked.  
Shadows gaped and roared  
and the trees flung down  
their sharpened lashes.  
He did not notice God's wrath.  
God blasted fire from half-buried stumps.  
I hid my face in my dress, fearing He would burn us all  
but this, too, passed.

Rescued, I see no truth in things.  
My husband drives a thick wedge  
through the earth, still it shuts  
to him year after year.  
My child is fed of the first wheat.  
I lay myself to sleep  
on a Holland-laced pillowbeer.  
I lay to sleep.  
And in the dark I see myself  
as I was outside their circle.

They knelt on deerskins, some with sticks,  
and he led his company in the noise  
until I could no longer bear  
the thought of how I was.  
I stripped a branch  
and struck the earth,  
in time, begging it to open  
to admit me  
as he was  
and feed me honey from the rock.

*Louise Erdrich*