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Sunflowers

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Two Poems · *Louise Erdrich*

SUNFLOWERS

When I walk into their bedroom at night
their cries fill my own mouth
so full of accurate misery,
heat flush, a stabbing in the gums,
something blind, with many hooks.
I drag the older one up into my arms
and talk until she opens her eyes.
The other
with her punishing beauty
ferments in a ball, soaked,
hot and vinegary.
I wash her.
The rag is sour.
But the talcum I shake into my palm
is dry and sweet.
Slowly, with both my hands,
I smooth along the hairline, throbbing with attention,
across the wishbone, the heart
vivid as a light,
down the arms, their tiny velvet muscles,
the arching torso, missing only the cleft
inside the diaper,
then the fat thighs, wet backs of the knees,
and the feet, small wooden apples.
Now their father brings the cold milk in bottles.
The doors shut.
We plunge into a dense twilight
that opens to a field of sunflowers,
each one of them a glowing clock,
turned, soft and bristling, to the bronze
face of the old god
who floats up from the east.
Cut loose, cut loose on the burning raft.