

# The Bear

By Susan Mitchell

Tonight the bear  
comes to the orchard and, balancing  
on her hind legs, dances under the apple trees,  
hanging onto their boughs,  
dragging their branches down to earth.  
Look again. It is not the bear  
but some afterimage of her  
like the car I once saw in the driveway  
after the last guest had gone.  
Snow pulls the apple boughs to the ground.  
Whatever moves in the orchard—  
heavy, lumbering—is clear as wind.

The bear is long gone.  
Drunk on apples,  
she banged over the trash cans that fall night,  
then skidded downstream. By now  
she must be logged in for the winter.  
Unless she is choosy.  
I imagine her as very choosy,  
sniffing at the huge logs, pawing them, trying  
each one on for size,  
but always coming out again.

Until tonight.  
Tonight sap freezes under her skin.  
Her breath leaves white apples in the air.  
As she walks she dozes,  
listening to the sound of axes chopping wood.  
Somewhere she can never catch up to  
trees are falling. Chips pile up like snow  
When she does find it finally,  
the log draws her in as easily as a forest,  
and for a while she continues to see,  
just ahead of her, the moon  
trapped like a salmon in the ice.

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Source: *The Water Inside The Water* (Wesleyan University Press, 1983)