

The Hunger Moon

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February's full moon which comes tonight is known as the Hunger Moon. The native peoples called it so. That's because back in the day when most of us were rural dwellers, by February, autumn's well-stocked larder had been largely depleted. People had only turnips and shrivelled, anemic potatoes in their root cellars, and maybe a squirrel or rabbit for supper and little else. Spring's promise of new life and a bountiful garden and good hunting had not yet arrived.

As it mounts the icy sky, though, it sets stark patterns of beauty. Nature writer Hal Borland describes it: "Footsteps in the snow become laced traceries of purple shadows. Starless ponds of night sky lay in a meadow's hollow. Roads become black velvet ribbons with winking frost sequins. Pines become whispering flocks of huge, dark birds. On hilltops and in pastures cedars are black candle flames. Warm-windowed houses and frost-roofed barns are all twins, each with its counterpart beside it on the snow."

The Hunger Moon is the winter's best moon. Tonight its edges will be frostbitten. Tomorrow night it will rise a bit less than an hour later and by next Monday it will begin to lose its roundness, as the sun by day reaches steadily toward the March equinox, promising spring and an end to hunger.

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