Marie Ursule woke up this morning knowing what morning it was and that it might be her last.

She had gathered the poisons the way anyone else might gather flowers, the way one gathers scents or small wishes and fondnesses. Gathering a bit here, wondering at a fiercely beautiful flower there. Tasting the waxiness of some leaves, putting her tongue on the prickliness or roughness of others. And she had been diligent and faithful the way any collector would be, any fervent lover. Scientific. Passionate. Every new knowledge, wonderful. She had even felt the knowing sadness, the melancholy that lovers feel, the haunting not-enough feeling, the way one covets the flight of swifts and terns and nightjars. She had sorted out the most benign vines from the most potent, collecting them all, and anything else she could find, recognizing the leaves through resemblance or smell or bitterness.

She had heard talk. She had listened to whispers from the Caribs and had made dealings with those of them left alive on the island after their own great and long devastation by the Europeans; their six-thousand-year-old trek over the Andes was close to ending here in Trinidad after four hundred years of war with the invaders. Meeting under curtains of heavy rains or unrelenting night, they had told Marie Ursule of a most secret way to ruin. Woorara they'd called it, their secret to rigour and breathlessness.

Wandering when she could wander, Marie Ursule husbanded the green twigs, the brown veins, the sticky bitterness, the most sanguine of plants. She loved their stems, their surprise of leaves as veined as her palms, their desperate bundles of berries, their hang of small flowers, and most of all the vine itself, its sinewed grace. She ground the roots to their arresting sweetness, scraped the bark for its abrupt knowledge. She had thought of other ways, bitter
cassava, manchineel apples, but their agonies could last for
days. Woorara, the Caribs had told her, was simple and
quick, though it had taken her years to collect. And wait.

Marie Ursule waited for evenings like a lover waits,
wanting soft light to embrace her. She looked over the ranges
of cocoa trees, their green and red leaves young and old with
longing. She imagined love waiting for her beyond the
hectares of ripening fruit. Evenings--when the clouds
descended upon the thick growth--kept secret her walks in
search of smells and exchanges, her meetings with a
straggle of Caribs, two men, three women, one boy, one
baby. The Caribs were becoming ancient and extinct even as
she looked into their faces, the last of their language
vanishing. Marie Ursule offered them her company, her
limp, her wish to die. Risking lashings she would go to their small
camp where she and they sat in each other's
contradictions, the straggle of Caribs moving reluctantly
toward the memory, Marie Ursule, willingly.

The last time, she had gone in a brief rain at the
beginning of December but they had broken camp and
disappeared, like the rain itself, the kind of quick rain that
raises the smell of the earth, steams the roots of things, then
vanishes leaving no trace of its passage. Their fire,
smoldering from the rain, was almost imperceptible. Perhaps
she should have left with them. Perhaps.

Hiding supplies in dugouts here and there, Marie
Ursule collected woorara as patiently as she had worn the
iron ring around her ankle. She collected it like a lover
collecting sorrows and believed hurts. Faithfully.

Marie Ursule woke up this morning knowing what
morning it was. Her flesh felt heavy. She could not get it off
the board. It was as if her body was tied taut across the wood
house like a hammock. She lay there for a while, gathering
her legs and her arms and commanding them to wake up. She turned on her side to look at the door, giving herself a direction, but no resolve came. It was to be her last morning and she had prepared everything long before, and now her flesh would not move.

At the Full and Change of the Moon

Dionne Brand, p1-3