

Pivotal  
Line →  
to be repeated  
later.

Focuses solely  
on idea of her  
defiance,  
building and  
repeating the  
concrete  
details  
of her  
long process  
of gathering  
the deadly  
plant faithfully,  
diligently.

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 encampment 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

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Near the end of this first section, the first references to the toll on her body hints at the second section that's coming.

Now she focuses solely on her second idea, the body and its destruction, its dehumanization

Repeat of first line, serving as a pivot point to spin into 2nd idea.

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.

Brand's depiction  
of the "violation of  
body" idea goes on  
until page 5, so it  
gets equal space.

At the Full and Change of the Moon

Dionne Brand, p1-3