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To Maida of Yugoslavia from My Book of Common Flowers: A Letter; Carrion

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*To Maida of Yugoslavia
From My Book of Common Flowers:
A Letter*

Dear Maida:

The tape I play before sleep, repeats
"tonight you will have a healing dream."
When I close my eyes I see green fields
lining the river of your home, the wild grasses,
dry flowers you boiled to clear my head of cold
that summer we met in Sisak. Just think of me
head bent over the steaming pot, white towel
draped down over seething brew, my red face,
to keep the healing in. There are no wild grasses,
flowers, to heal this wish to see you. By now,
mid-summer, you're knee-deep in the Serbo-
Croatian landscape that envelops your life
and closes you in.

No is the word I think of when your face appears
in my dreams, only because no is handed to you,
a sentence I can't fathom. Your husband
and his keys that won't let you out
of the kitchen to hear a choir
practice in the park. Instead, you practice
the lines you would say had you no children,
the hard line you would walk, back
only slightly bent against the cold stares
of tradition, communism, catholicism
that won't let a woman walk
away from a man or the vicious love
of your son and daughter that won't let you
go. Oh Maida, what might you be thinking now,
brushing hard crumbs from the table.

You say "some such something" when you don't know the words
to speak your thoughts in English. I say odd things
when no words come. Bogbean, buckbean. Now I know the name
of your remedy, your healing, no matter the language
it grows in. I've been reading of Leonurus,
Motherwort, which stimulates the heart.
There is no better herb to take
the melancholy vapors, says my book

of common flowers. Leonurus,
it settles the womb and makes mothers
joyful. Or get this. St. Johnswort.
It cures madness. Anyone treading it after dark
will be wheeled through the heavens all night
on the back of a magical horse. My love to you Maida.
Denise.

Denise Williams

Carrion

My father's thoughts are crows beating a blue
black sky. A sky of soft wind and water, breaking
like low thunder. My father's hands tremble as he loads
shells in the basement. He speaks of the sweet kill.
He speaks this indirectly, with words like Deer Mountain,
buck mount, and return--ringing with the echo.

of rifle fire. My father hands over his life to the hills,
coming softly through trees, shifting the hard dirt.
The brass in his hands is sleek
and he rubs the bullet with his thumb. With stone
aim, my father fires. Explosives ring, gun smoke
trailing the distance. He bends to see the precision

of his craft--a clean kill. Tough
scavenger crows float in the circular sky,
their brass eyes riveted on the carcass that drains
in slow rivers that run through the green iris
of my father's eyes.

Denise Williams