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Persephone Sets the Record Straight

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Shara McCallum

PERSEPHONE SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

You are all the rage these days,
mother. Everywhere I turn, I hear
Demeter in mourning, Demeter
grieving . . . poor Demeter.

Always craving the spotlight,
I know this is what you wanted:
your face on the front page
of all the papers; gossip

columns filled with juicy tidbits
on *what life was like before winter*,
old hags in the grocery store, whispering,
how she's let the flowers go,

while young women hover
in their gardens, fearing their hibiscus
will be next on your hit list.
After all these summers,

you still won't come clean.
Passing me iced tea, instead
you ask, *how's the redecorating?*
are you expanding

to make room for little ones?
Fanning away flies,
you avoid my eyes, saying,
I've so longed to be a grandma,

you know.
For God's sake, mother,

can't you tell me the truth now it's done?
Just once, tell me

how you put me in that field
knowing he'd come,
that you made snow fall
everywhere to cover your tracks,

that the leaves die still
because you can't punish him
for confirming your suspicions:
not wanting you,

he took me instead.
Of course I ate those seeds.
Who wouldn't have
exchanged one hell for another?

IN THE GARDEN OF BANANA AND COCOANUT TREES

Before the woman's hips
would come to sashay
to other rhythms,
before the man's hands
would grow still, leave
the hollowed-out wood body,
before she would take lovers
over her children,
before his mind would lose
itself to songs
of angels and demons,
before the gospel and herb,

there was my mother,
cooking cornmeal porridge,
plantains and callaloo for later,