

## Flower Key

When we begin dating, all I know of his suburb is its proximity to a city made of four-lane roads and dilapidated takeaway-strewn streets.

But he shows me the green that veins the housing estates around him. The whispering trees, the winding brooks, the meadows whose grasses drink up the wine of the evening sun until they glow.

He likes to be outdoors, yet he lacks much of its language. As we walk our routes like a couple already grown old together, my fingers brush the nodding stalks of plants and I tell him their names. Garlic mustard. Yorkshire fog. Common knapweed. Teasel. Wild carrot.

When we return to his home, his hands journey over my skin. I have been with others before, but only now do I realise how much they took and how little they gave back. My body was blank and waiting all this time. Softly, he tells me what his favourite parts of me are, and they become mine too.

Ox-eye daisy. Ragwort. Great burnet. Bird's-foot trefoil. Bush vetch. Meadow foxtail.

I repeat the names, letting them sink into his memory. The weights of our steps must be growing familiar to these places, in the same way that his hands retrace their own paths, turning me into another kind of map.