

Poems from *Vigilance Is No Orchard*

Book-length poem sequence (Nightboat Books, 2018) on landscape architect Isabelle Greene's famous "Valentine garden," made for Carol Valentine, in Santa Barbara, CA.

From first section: "View 1: Away from vertical"

Finding a photograph of the Valentine garden, my gaze locked. Then my elbow dropped. I was holding something.

Writing had become turgid, ordinarant; whereas this garden—with yarrow flowers and lilies, both ribbed—unfolded shockingly flat.

A view encourages distribution, so I set out to advance beyond habit,

to the entrance, which landscape architect Isabelle Greene shaped low and open to draw a visitor forward.

Seventeen years pass, and I'm looking back to tell the Valentine story from all points of contact:

Terraces that step down gently were a clue that Greene intended a seamless departure. My feet anchored in groundcover, my head could ride the lines there, on air's back.

Also, the pond, where to hang under the reeds on the slate over the water is gulping shelter and view at once, and I plunged into reflection and lugged the light in the sky back to the firm rock.

I bowed low to Greene's motion. Accepted the blow of it—I must know the how of its thinnest leaf on its strongest breeze, be sure, as my back was bending in astonishment.

I would trespass. Attention iterating, amplifying, manic, exactly how I had dreamt it.

Let me turn up the volume: My acquaintance with the image did not begin dimly. I lost my brisket, I mean basket.

From third section: "View 3: What wants to occur"

Cleverness doesn't cut it at the threshold from one experience to another. A bird flits from boulder to boulder—tries out a nook near the water, swoops right by here, as in a plot twist, or something sprouting in the heat of meeting, with no pause as being goes slickly through the slipknot into doing.

The breeze comes
up and down the ditch, to my wrist, whispers up my sleeve, grows less identical with
itself through the comfort of enclosure.

Write as a limb sways,

as the *Eucalyptus citriodora*, lankily over the roof, casts off nonchalantly,
many leaves or taking leave, intention lost. This all explorative along a midrib.

From fifth section: "Refuge 1: Cut at it"

Motions in a body schema may begin to bunch—as textures in the garden pick up here and here into a congregation listing toward the light—locking with the view.

A daydream of speech becomes a form of movement, eager in the flat pride of riding out and over, even painfully, in the sunshine.

The twist begins far

below at my feet. A body pursuing a claim
churns a frenzy of orientation.

Allows a mute part to bruise, swell, bush sideways
on the land shelf, and reset itself into survival under way.

“Postscript”

At the end of the garden—

an orchard and a field of pork and beans growing in, growing out, no fuss, language earning its keep. Why did I go in to index its presence, risk such a vascular distribution! I tie the why of it into the larger landscape (no upright needed) to make a new out-of-frame direction, transparent churn toward exit, brittle flecks of effort on the insides of my arms, but I keep my chin lifted. The image no longer money but the spring that lost its victorious tones against the trunk of the pomegranate tree and presents itself, if I squat, in a memory beneath my feet.

—Reader, you’ve come through, across, close by. I’m thinking of you from here, in San Francisco, six miles in from the Pacific Ocean, verifying the lines of my dress, its embroidery, a round-the-back button of my own. Because a garden, like a photograph, can die, I’m placing the flat fact of it here, in the dry, like certainty’s stored apples and pears.