A GAZE HOUND THAT HUNTETH BY THE EYE

Cf. William Harrison, “Of Our English Dogs and Their Qualities,” Holinshed’s Chronicles, 1587

It’s not criminal: it isn’t sodomy
    or taking horses to Scotland
    or poaching the king’s deer.
    Though it seems like witchcraft, this
    entranced spasm of pleasure my presence

triggers in my wriggling pup. Now lap-ensconced,
    she gobbles a fancy kiln-dried
    carp skin, snowing its small
    smelly flakes on the carpet.
    Her squid-tentacle tongue slaps my chin—joy!

But this cuddling repels Mister Harrison,
    Vicar of Wimbish. He’s gathered
    descriptions of English
    dogs, furniture, fashions, fairs,
    sundry corporal punishments and ships

flying her majesty’s flag for chronicles
    Shakespeare will pinch from to flesh out
    his kings. If I didn’t
    know by now how much I know
    sieves down to me from men who winced at dames

soothing their hot spells or chilly wombs with love
    minced into morsels and hand-fed
    to pets, my face would sting
    afresh below the vicar’s
    volley of slaps. How he despises us,
irksome older women *trifling away all
treasure of time* with our perverse
cossetings. Some feeble
palsied ladies even tuck
a little peke or pug inside their shawls

for warmth! Poor man. He’s better off dead, not here
forced to catalogue how, today,
I climbed off my broomstick
and smooched my leashed familiar
shamelessly on her damp nose, taking her

along to weed my pandemic victory
garden. Of course, true victory
gardens grow human food;
my perennials will feed
mainly bees. Call it my foresight garden,

all charms still speculative. Last week I lost
hours online looking for blue
false indigo, native
but hard to find this season
of quarantined green thumbs with their itchy
digger-fingers lusting to plug a few dead
-seeming sticks in dirt. (My vaccine
against panic’s fussing
about how I’m going to set
this smatter of pale blue hearts aflutter
over new beds of hyssop.) Soiled and toil-sore
from planting, last night I bedded
   King Richard II,
   book on my belly in air
finally warm enough to lie naked

atop the sheets in, windows flung open
to the spring peepers’ rainy bells.
   In Shakespeare’s uterus
   of a mind the chronicles
seeded this fruit. It offered me toothsome
distractions from the news—Richard’s a wretched
leader, but he’s not a human
   trashfire like some. Who’s fit
to govern the garden of
the state? Flinchless, the first Elizabeth
dead-headed traitors and shut plaguey stages
   but she had, I recall, the heart
   and stomach of a man.
She left no issue but art
breastfed on the rich milks of empire

her ships ploughed the seas to reach. Settlers came here
   and native people not yet sick
   taught them about dying
cloth blue with false indigo.
What hunger for blue! So scarce in nature,
had I myself lived in a warm colony
farmed by captive labor circa
1740, I
too might have owned a rich crop
of color, breeding wealth. Indigo’s stench

poisoned those who boiled and pounded the leaves, but
back then I might have seen only
pretty buds. Resilient
reminder of forced transplants,
false indigo improves poor soil, as if

blooming is the best revenge. This sprout I’ve set
will be a triumphant blue shout
I’ll bow to, salaaming
as I weed. Blue tints, so rare
they’re absent from this antique kelim, scaled

now with carp skin. The corner’s askew, pooch-chewed
one New Year’s eve in New York’s fret-
work of fire-works. Good thing
the vicar didn’t catch me
next dawn, old bitch crouched beneath a scything

wind off the Gowanus canal, poking through
my mutt’s scat with a plastic straw
picked out of the gutter
to make sure the shreds of heir-
loom vegetable-dyed wool had made a safe
backstage exit. I'd not have the vicar's ilk
see me bend. No. I kneel only
in service to new growth
thickening the history
of gardens, tending to those I adore.