

## A GAZE HOUND THAT HUNTETH BY THE EYE

Cf. William Harrison, "Of Our English Dogs and Their Qualities,"  
*Holinshead'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.