

Mysteries

of Silence



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WISTERIA

*(At St. Michael's Orthodox School, Santa Rosa,  
on grounds once owned by the horticulturist Luther Burbank)*

A tapestry of sky woven into your balconies.

Graceful arms stretch the canopy in clustered blooms.  
Each is a bell announcing one of the hours.

Under the veil of your perpetual incense,  
children learn to listen, sing and play..

The mysterious gardener that planted and pruned you, trained  
your branches to embrace and overshadow these buildings...  
Flowering during the fast, how many years to grow this large and strong?

Silent witness of the interior secret,  
whisper—what is in the seedpod?

“The secret is this: when it falls  
safely cradled in its pod,  
the pea does not know  
it has separated from me.

“When the dried hull shrivels open  
and disintegrates into rain,  
the seed does not know  
the earth that its tiny fingers explore  
is not its mother.

“Learns to turn over, learns to crawl;  
one day sitting up,  
head erect with wonder,  
the seedling does not know  
that its parent everywhere overhead in bloom  
has not always been there.”

And the children in the old house where the master gardener studied  
look around at the images and writings of their fathers,  
hear the words of creation in the old secret way.

“It only believes,  
when the purple towers of thunderstorms  
are scattered across the evening distance,  
that clouds are full-grown wisteria,  
when the tall rain leans down to feed its roots  
and splash the hills with rainbows.”

Preparing the Manuscript

*of a*

Garden Journal



PREPARING THE MANUSCRIPT  
OF A GARDEN JOURNAL

I. Invocation

Give me a corner of the Santa Rosa plain  
with skies to every horizon  
made beautiful by the changing angles of the sun  
or slow incoming clouds,  
or the splendid vesting and monthly disrobing of the moon  
on the high turntable of stars.

Give me a field bordered by a creek  
with its trees of nesting birds  
embraced by the slender arm of a spring-fed mountain.  
I will build my garden hut within reach of the waterfall's voice  
and answer with my song,  
dawn and dusk, the low flight of chanting geese,  
swallows diving through the tall last light,  
early shadows invaded by the dove-note  
and quail like whispered shadows that run in the grass.  
As the sun climbs its vast-wheeled altitudes  
they fly into higher branches,  
calling one another from hushed distances.  
And the coarse statements of crows and jays,  
the eloquent mockingbird and full-throated pheasant  
in a rush of flight and song and theophany  
follow the flight of the sun to its soaring zenith,  
then silence. The hawk's high scream.  
White falcons hover, flashing in the light.



## II. Philosophy and Scholarship in Gardening

While the winter rains took thought  
for the preparation of soils,  
inside the window of my steep-roofed shed  
I studied the topography's ancient poetry  
of drained wetlands, the headwaters  
of rivers long vanished beneath the earth,  
and perused great books:  
Hesiod and Virgil, the philosophy of farming,  
studies of intensive companion plantings  
and my grandfather's notes, scratched into the soil.

Before the earth was broken,  
it was fertilized by the flowering silver planets  
Jupiter and Saturn in sublime concert all winter.  
September, they first rose together  
from the silhouetted eastern mountain.  
December, high in the fields of Pleiades,  
behind the brilliant bull they dug through the stars  
while I sat in the plowman's wagon  
with my telescope in the outer galaxies,  
and aged Bootes cast out the shining seed  
that blossoms in constellations.  
By the time they went down in the late growing sunsets,  
fully open in the rarest blossoms of light,  
I had mastered their names and seasons, their trajectories, and moons.



III. The Labors of Adam

The sun comes up hot  
as soon as it clears the mountain.  
Already through the dawn hours from first light  
I've labored, turning the soil while it still holds moisture,  
digging in manure, leaf compost, calcium.  
Now I retreat to the shade of my garden hut  
to listen to the quail's sweet recitations  
while I sing the psalms and matins of inspired triodion  
that watered the ancient deserts.

In the poet St Walafrid's lenten garden  
were gathered the blossoms of solitude  
which, when they came to miraculous fruit,  
bore sweet fulness indescribably descending  
like the breeze that comes over the plain in the cool of evening.  
He, too, with his hand pulled stinging nettles  
that choked the soil by his cell,  
obedient to his monastics' contemplative table.  
He, with his hand obedient to the rule,  
measured and prepared on sacrificed vellum  
the illuminated manuscript of his labors,  
leaving in quiet lyrics, written in the sweat  
of the fountain of miracles in his radiant brow,  
a mist that came out of the earth.

Now I return to the hot field-work,  
to the exhaustion of my grandfathers laid in the earth,  
and the sun goes down  
at a more severe angle  
to the trees of the level horizon, farther and farther north,  
where its last burning minutes are endless  
as the prehistoric speech of standing stones.

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