

LA FLORA

The Sublime

A letter to the listener

Before you begin — The meditations were written to be met without explanation. If you have not yet listened to the album, you may want to do that first. The letter will be here when you want to know more. But there is no wrong order — some find the meditations deeper once they trust where the album is taking them.

The sublime is not something you reach for. It is what has been reaching you.

The album gathered itself from many voices over many years. A Roman emperor writing notes to himself. A contemporary philosopher arguing for the objectivity of beauty. A Portuguese poet writing under another name. A Russian novelist describing a man mowing a field. A Brazilian writer reaching for the instant a thing simply is. An Irish singer turning a litany of thanks into prayer. None of them set out to write a meditation. They wrote what they wrote. The meditations sit inside their work.

What unites them is the same recognition, returned to from seven angles. That the deepest experience of being alive is not the result of striving. That awe, beauty, freedom, recognition, gratitude — these are not goals. They are conditions that have been waiting for the listener their whole life, and the noticing of them is the entire work.

A brief note for those arriving here without context: La Flora is a contemplative practice — a library of guided meditations, organized into albums, and a newsletter called Field Notes. The Sublime is the third album. The letter you are reading or listening to is its companion.

There is a version of the sublime that belongs to the Romantic tradition — the storm at sea, the mountain too vast to take in, the trembling before nature's indifference. That sublime is real, and people who have felt it know what they have felt. But this album is not about that one.

This album is about a quieter sublime. The kind that arrives when a flower you have loved appears, intact, in the mind. When you remember being seen by a stranger you never saw again. When the body carries you through a task you cannot quite remember performing. The sublime that does not require a mountain. It only requires that the noticing slow down enough to let it through.

This is the album's whole argument: that the sublime has been reaching you for years, and the meditations are seven invitations to let it reach you.

Track 1

Every Petal in Its Place opens the album with a flower. The meditation draws from David Deutsch's argument, in the book *The Beginning of Infinity*, that the beauty of flowers is real — objective, not projected — because flowers had to evolve a beauty that could be recognized across the gap between species. Bees do not see the way we see. And yet flowers had to attract them — and the same features, Deutsch argues, are what we recognize as beauty, even though we were never the intended audience. “Displace even one petal,” Deutsch writes, “and there would be diminishment.”

Marcus Aurelius makes the parallel claim from another direction. “*That which is really beautiful has no need of anything; not more than law, not more than truth, not more than benevolence or modesty. Which of these things is beautiful because it is praised, or spoiled by being blamed?*” The flower's beauty was not made for the eye that recognizes it. It is true on its own.

The meditation invites the listener to recall a flower they have loved — its color, its scent, the way it moved in air — and to notice that the arrangement of the flower could not have been otherwise. Then, gently, to recognize the same about themselves. Every part of them sitting where it does,

not by accident, not by performance, but by an inner necessity that beauty quietly recognizes. *Every petal in its place. The same is true of you.*

Track 2

You Were Met draws from the same chapter of Deutsch — the argument that signalling across the gap between two human beings is structurally akin to signalling across the gap between two entire species. Each person, in knowledge terms, is more singular than any other living thing. The inner country of any one person cannot be fully entered by anyone else. And yet, sometimes, the crossing happens.

The *Field Note* for this track sits with two voices. Virginia Woolf closes *To the Lighthouse* on four words — “*I have had my vision*” — that Lily Briscoe arrives at after a novel’s worth of reaching. And James Baldwin writes that “*the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world.*”

The meditation invites the listener to recall a person who once truly saw them — not glanced at, not knew of, but met. A teacher. A stranger across a long conversation. Whoever crossed the interior distance and arrived. The recognition the meditation builds is not sentimental. It is structural. Two private worlds brushed against each other. A signal sent from one interior arrived, intact, in another. Nothing was lost in the crossing. *That this happened at all is one of the small astonishments of having been alive.*

Track 3

The Color That Colors sits inside Fernando Pessoa — or rather, inside one of his heteronyms. Pessoa wrote under many names, and the poems that became this meditation belong to Alberto Caeiro, a shepherd-philosopher whose voice is so plain it almost disappears into what it sees. In one of the Caeiro poems, he notices a butterfly passing in front of him, and writes that the color is what has color in the butterfly’s wings. The movement is what moves. The perfume perfumes. The butterfly is only butterfly. The flower is only flower. The qualities are happening between the thing and

the eye that meets it — not inside the thing, not inside the eye.

Clarice Lispector reaches for the same recognition. *“Each thing has an instant in which it simply is. What I want is to grab this being out of the thing. I am behind what lies behind thought”*.

The meditation invites the listener to feel the consequence. The qualities others have named in them — their beauty, their kindness, their way with words — were never properly theirs to keep. Which means they are not theirs to lose. The release is structural. The world goes on coloring. The perfumes go on perfuming. *You cannot lose what is not yours.*

Track 4

The Body Knew Without You draws from Leo Tolstoy. In *Anna Karenina*, Konstantin Levin picks up a scythe one summer afternoon and joins the peasants in the field. He spends hours doing work he has never done before, and somewhere in the middle of it, the part of him that worries quietly steps aside. *“In the midst of his toil there were moments during which he forgot what he was doing, and it came all easy to him. It seemed not his hands that swung the scythe, but the scythe mowing of itself, a body full of life and consciousness of its own.”*

Tolstoy was not writing a meditation. He was writing a novel about a man searching for the answer to a question he could not quite formulate. But what he discovered, in writing the mowing scene, is what the meditation discovers too: that the watching self can step aside, and the body keeps the moment. This has happened to the listener many times. Stirring something on the stove. Folding cloth. Brushing a child’s hair. Watering a plant. Whatever the body did so well that the listener, briefly, stopped being there to watch.

The meditation walks the listener into the middle of one such moment — never the beginning, because the body’s knowing does not begin at the beginning — and lets them feel that the body has been carrying them, mostly unnoticed, for as long as they have been alive. *The body knew without you.*

Track 5

Running with Them takes its title from Marcus Aurelius. “Dwell on the beauty of life. Watch the stars, and see yourself running with them.”

Marcus wrote this to himself, in Greek, during long years on military campaigns at Rome’s northern frontier. The *Meditations* were notebooks, not letters; he was not writing for anyone but himself. The instruction is plain and stoic: when the difficulties of the day are pressing in, lift the attention to the patient motion of the stars, and remember that you are part of that motion too. The stars are not in their courses despite you. You are running with them.

The meditation gives the listener the same instruction without naming it. It invites them, first, to notice the shape their body has been holding — the bracing that no longer remembers being bracing. Then it asks them to notice that the earth has been turning the whole time, the stars have been moving the whole time, and they have been moving with them. *You have been moving the whole time. The stars never stopped. The earth never stopped. The bracing was the only stillness, and the stillness was an illusion.*

Mary Oliver gave the meditation its permission. “*You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.*” The body does not have to ask to belong to its motion. It has always belonged.

Track 6

Freedom Is No Fear takes its title from Nina Simone. In 1968, asked by Peter Rodis what freedom meant to her, she tried several answers. Then she gave the answer the meditation rests on.

“I’ll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear!”

The meditation does not ask the listener to overcome fear. It does something more patient. Etty Hillesum, in *An Interrupted Life*, wrote that we

must not only seek inner freedom from one another — we must also leave the other free, abandoning any fixed concept we may have of him in our imagination. The meditation turns this inward. The version of yourself you have been carrying — the way you have described yourself to yourself for years — is not who you are. Beneath the version, the body is here, alive, doing things the version cannot describe.

The release is not transformation. It is permission. *You do not have to be who you have decided you are.* Not in this hour. Not right now.

Track 7

Thanks Be closes the album. It is a litany — forty-seven lines of gratitude, one *thank you* per line, moving through the body, the world, the senses, the beings who have shared themselves with the listener, the things that continued without asking permission, and finally the parts of the self that did not turn to stone.

The form comes from two places. Marcus Aurelius opens his *Meditations* with a long gratitude to the people who shaped him. “*From the gods I received good ancestors, good parents, good teachers, good companions.*” He spends the entire first book naming what was given. Gratitude was the only place he could have begun. Everything that follows in the *Meditations* — every correction to himself, every steadying instruction — rests on what is named in the first book.

And then there is Sinéad O’Connor.

I want to name one debt at the close of this letter. Sinéad O’Connor’s voice has been with me for most of my listening life. *Thank You for Hearing Me* gave this album’s seventh meditation its form. She lands here, at the album’s close, the way an Irish blessing lands — not as instruction, only as gift.

That is the album.

I want to say something about what it refuses, because the refusals are as much a part of the work as the writing. The meditations do not give instructions for posture, breath, or attention technique. They do not name what the listener should feel. They do not promise transformation, healing, awakening, or any of the things meditation has been sold to deliver. They do not use the vocabulary of contemporary mindfulness culture — no “*letting go*”, no “*presence as practice*”, no “*noticing without judgment*”. Not because those phrases are wrong, but because they have been worn so smooth that they no longer touch anything. The meditations also do not explain themselves. The listener will not be told what each meditation is about, what tradition the work descends from, or what they should take away. This is the one place — here, in this letter — where the explanation happens. The meditations stay quiet. They have to.

The sublime is not something you reach for. It is what has been reaching you.

The flower has been beautiful. The stranger has seen you. The qualities you carried were never yours to lose. The body has been carrying you. The stars have been moving. The version is not who you are. The breath is blessed.

None of these began with the noticing. They are not made by being noticed. They are only, when the noticing slows down enough, allowed through.

That is the only argument *The Sublime* makes. The reaching has not stopped. Only what we let reach us changes.

You may stay.
— Iara

[Listen]

May you remain — open, undefended — where the sublime can find you.

