

LA FLORA

On Verdure

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.

You do not have to bring your life back.

It returns on its own. The greening — the aliveness, the warmth, the low green motion that pushes sap up a stem and brings a wintered field back into leaf — has gone quiet in you before, and has never once failed to come again. It is not a thing you summon. It comes because it is warm enough, and wet enough, and it is time.

You might come to this album on a day when you have run dry. When you have been holding yourself up for so long that the holding has become the only thing you know how to do. When the life in you has gone quiet, and you cannot quite remember how to start it moving again — and are not sure you have it in you to try. When you have given until there is nothing left to give, and the thought of summoning more is its own kind of tired. When you are waiting, without much hope, for something to come back.

The album does not ask you to bring it back. It turns, slowly, toward the greening that returns on its own — and it steers you down toward the warm, damp ground where that greening begins, and then lets you feel it rise. Nothing here needs to be summoned or forced. The greening was never yours to perform.

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. Verdure is the fifth album. The letter you are reading or listening to is its companion.

The album takes its name and its whole life from one person, and I want to tell you about her.

Eight hundred years ago, a Benedictine abbess named Hildegard of Bingen gave a name to the force she felt running through everything alive. She called it *viriditas* — the greening power: the vitality that pushes sap up a stem, unfurls a leaf, and brings the dried and wintered world back into green. For Hildegard this was not a figure of speech. It was the actual life in things — moist, and warm, and fiery all at once — and its deepest characteristic was that it returns. What goes dry greens again. What quiets wakes. She was also a physician, and in her medicine the greening, *viriditas*, was health itself, and its opposite — *ariditas*, dryness — was illness. So this album, made for the dried-out and the depleted, is close to her own prescription: not a cure applied from outside, but the greening remembered from within.

Verdure is that word carried into English. *Viriditas*, *verdure*, *viridis* — they are all the same Latin root, green. The title is Hildegard's own word without the locked door of the Latin: the lush green of flourishing things. This is, above all, one long meditation. It begins in the deepest rest and rises, movement by movement — a first stir, a climbing, a leafing, a catching of light, a widening to the whole living world — until, at the very end, it turns over. You can listen to any single track on the day you need only that one, and it will hold you. But it was built to be walked from the first to the last, the way you might walk a season. Taken that way, the seven become one journey — from the ground, to the light, to the vast living world you turn out to have been inside all along.

None of this is accidental. La Flora's whole practice refuses to explain. The plants explain themselves by growing. The poets by their lines. The meditations only by being met. This letter is the one place where I name what

they were built from, and why — including a few true things about the living world that the meditations quietly rest on, and never once say aloud.

What follows is a word about each: what it is for, what it rests on, and the voices woven through it.

Track 1

For when you cannot hold yourself up anymore, and need somewhere to set the whole weight down.

The Quiet That Holds You is the album's lowest, slowest place — the body met, warmed, and given over until it rests in warm, damp ground. That ground is not nowhere. It is where everything green begins. A seed does nothing in the dark; it waits, whole and closed, until the earth around it grows warm enough and wet enough — and only then does it wake. There is a poem of Rilke's under this one, his *Gravity's Law*, where he watches how each thing — the stone, the bird, the falling flower — gives itself to the pull of the earth, and calls that not defeat but trust. The heaviness this meditation sinks toward is that kind: the good weight of a body that has set down, at last, the work of holding itself up.

Track 2

For when you feel dried out and nothing in you is moving, and you need the first small sign that the life is still there.

A Low Fire Catching is the first stir — the oldest life there is beginning to move again, low and slow, in the warm dark, on its own. What it rests on is a fact that ought to be impossible: life can wait an astonishingly long time and still come back. A seed may lie dry and dormant for years — some have waited centuries, and one date-palm seed, recovered from an old fortress and planted, woke and grew after two thousand years. Theodore Roethke

knew this in his hands; he was raised among his family's greenhouses, and in *Cuttings* he watched a cut, rootless stem strain to put out one pale root — “what saint strained so much, rose on such lopped limbs to a new life?” The stir this meditation waits with is that small, and that stubborn.

Track 3

For when something in you has begun to move again, and you want to let it rise — to feel the life climb back up through you on its own, without your having to lift it.

Flowering From Within is the rising: warmth and water drawn up through the whole of you, toward the light. How a tree does this is one of the quiet astonishments of the living world. It has no pump. It lifts water from its roots to its highest leaf — in the tallest trees, more than three hundred feet, straight up, against all the weight of the world — on nothing but sunlight and thirst: the sun draws the water off the leaves as vapor, and the whole column below rises to follow, held together by the water's own refusal to come apart. Galway Kinnell gave the meditation its name, from *Saint Francis and the Sow* — the poem in which Francis lays his hand on the brow of a sow and reteaches her her own loveliness, until “**everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing.**” The climb this meditation follows is that: not forced, only blessed upward.

Track 4

For when something in you has begun to come back, and you want to feel it make again — to leaf out on its own, without forcing it, and without its taking from you what you cannot spare.

Its Own Unfolding is the making — the risen life opening, leafing, putting forth its own green. Two true things sit beneath it. The first: a leaf is the organ that feeds the whole plant, so the more a green thing leafs out, the more

of itself can drink light and air and make what it lives on. It is not spent by what it makes; it is fed by it. The second is stranger. That green cannot even be built without iron — starve a plant of iron and its new leaves come in pale and yellow, unable to green at all. The very metal whose name we borrow for cold and hardness is the thing the greenness is made from. D. H. Lawrence felt this long before he could have known the chemistry, in Sicily, watching almond trees flower out of black, iron-hard winter wood — “even iron can put forth,” he wrote, “even iron.”

Track 5

For when the life in you has come back, and you want to feel it come all the way alight — your warmth turning to light and filling you to the brim, and to be fully alive again without being burned up by it.

The Living Light is the quickening — the warmth in you turning, at last, to light. Here is the fact the whole album has been climbing toward, and it is not a figure of speech: the fire of being alive is the sun’s fire. Sunlight falls on a leaf; the leaf catches it and locks it away; you eat the leaf, or something that ate it; and inside you that stored sun is set loose again as your warmth, your motion, your being awake. To be warm is to be, very quietly, burning. And a living body is not firewood going to ash — it is a flame the sun keeps feeding, so that it can light and light and never be spent. To Hildegard, green and fire were never two things; she called the radiance of her own visions the living Light, and said it had never once consumed her. Stanley Kunitz would have understood her — a poet who tended a seaside garden into his hundredth year, and wrote, late, “a new life begins for me, as it does each day.”

Track 6

For when the life in you has come all the way back, and you want to feel how far it reaches — that the same life moving in you is moving in everything alive, and that you are one of the living, held inside it all.

Blood and Breath and Bloom is the widening — the one life in you felt as the same life in the grass, the water, the others, the far stars. And the largest fact in this whole letter lives here: the iron that reddens your blood is the very iron that greens a leaf, and every atom of it was forged in the heart of a star, long ago, in that star's dying, then flung out across the dark to become worlds, and grass, and bodies. The vastness is not only around you. It is what you are made of. Two voices stand at this threshold. Tagore, who wrote that the same stream of life that runs through his veins runs night and day through the world, "and shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass." And Thomas Traherne — a country parson whose manuscripts were lost for two hundred years and found by chance on a London bookstall, long after his death — who promised that you are not truly rich "till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars."

Track 7

For when you have been holding yourself up for a long time and are ready to set the whole of it down — to feel your last edge soften, and find yourself held, and carried, inside a living world without end that has had you the whole time.

A Fish Held in the Sea is the turning-over. Everything that rose through the body is revealed, here, to have been holding it all along — the body found to be floating inside a living world without end. This last meditation does one thing none of the others do: it says a name aloud. A recognition surfaces in it that Plato once put into words, that others had reached for long before him, and that Hildegard, centuries on, reached in her own way. There is a plain truth folded into the image, too: the first living things were held in warm water, and each of us floated in warm water before we were born, and carries a trace of that first sea still, in the salt of the blood. Tolstoy stands at the close, through Pierre — a prisoner of war who looks up one night at the enormous sky and understands that they may shut his body in a shed, but the vastness overhead is in him, is him, and no shed can hold it. This is the only meditation that ends in a blessing. After all the dry, it falls like rain.

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. They do not tell you what to feel — they cannot, and they never try. They do not promise transformation, healing, or arrival. They do not use the worn vocabulary of contemporary mindfulness — 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 they no longer touch anything. And, with a single exception, they do not explain themselves. That exception is the last track, where one name is spoken aloud. Everywhere else, the meditations stay quiet. This letter is where the explaining happens, so that they don't have to.

The seven are one long greening, and they can be taken as one — walked from the first to the last, down into the warm ground, then the waking, the rising, the leafing, the light, the widening, and the turning-over into being held. But each also stands alone for the day you need only that one: the rest when you cannot hold yourself up, the first stir when nothing is moving, the light when the life has come back, the sea when you are ready to set the whole of it down. Take the one you need, or take them all. The greening does not mind where you begin.

What runs beneath all seven is the same, and it does not depend on your remembering it to be true: the warmth, the water, the greening, the holding. None of it asks to be earned. The green returns whether or not you are watching it return. It has been holding you the whole time.

You may stay.

— Iara

[Listen]

— May the life reach all the way down to the root of you.

