

KEVIN CLARK

STOCK AND ROOT

SACRAMENTO VALLEY

The late October sunlight, elaborate
in the withered garden, the melons
rotting amid the deflated vines, signal

reason for taking stock and root,
here and again. Lately, I run
against the afternoon light

toward the sorrel hills, turn north
out the state road to Guinda,
Madison and Zamora, the small neighbors

ushering their children indoors,
the stores shutting, even the police
home for dinner. At six miles

I curl east, the horizon vanished,
and I can hear it, the bass trudge
rumbling across fields of feed corn.

In high school every step was a race.
Now, as I break for middle age,
this noise signifies decline

and refusal: I bolt to beat the freight
across the frontage road.
(Every night I win, though once

last year, I outran the angry engine
by a tight ten yards
and the horn's blast.) But

this poem intends more, how
I sweep down the last mile
into the neighborhood and walk

circles around the house,
my dog Jake bouncing
at my return, how I stretch

in the twilight. Tonight
the valley air delivers its special
scent of smoke and moist harvest.

The garden comes alive again.
My sheep kneel in the moonlight.
This is the taking stock.

I tell Jake it's time for supper,
and before closing the door behind us,
I look into the tumultuous shadows.

I think: if I must die, let it be
here, in autumn, during harvest.
This is the taking root.