

be|adonna



#65

Fall 2004

Untitled, Woman on  
Ground

by  
Renee Gladman



deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries

The tarmac burns your skin. You're going to have to scream that it hurts.

But cars moving north begin to bottle up, as you are lying on the ground.

All your electronics have been smashed and no longer perform.

The blood you have lost gathers around you.

The way your mother would, if she knew.

The way M. would.

At times, the crowd swells with excitement. For instance, when the news truck arrives and the journalist rushes over to say he's seen the ambulance. He says, "You've got to wait." Breathing heavily. He studies all the people pressing in. "Did someone speak to you already?" You shake your head; he seems upset anyway. "I've brought photographers," he informs despondently.

Did you want that water splashed on you? (I sent it.)

Thank that man from the bagel shop...I think.

I'm jealous that you are living this storybook script, that you are doing what everyone at one point or another considers wholeheartedly—living in the city! You are being very literal today, lying there in the street, clinging (the crowd says) to residency.

“This street is enraged with traffic and heat and passersby on a day like this,” the journalist speaks into the microphone. He wants to know if anyone saw anything, and perhaps gave that disclaimer to lessen the stress of perfection, in case a person’s view was only partial—you think.

The blood you are losing belongs to M.

You want so desperately to shout.

But you have no strength.

They’re not letting you move.

You are still alive, though.

It’s just that the ground is so very hot.

It scalds you.

(I didn’t think how adding that water might be like boiling.)

“We have lost another one today.” You hear these words fished out of the crowd, sometimes a question, sometimes a response. You’ve got the bandana clenched in your fist. You glance around the circle—as well as you can without lifting your neck—looking for the fisherman.

Sasha's voice recorded as such:

"Gimme...up...to knocking...several times...beat it behind the porch...  
to...to...stalyard...up and down...left it for you...call me back."

This for which to return home, if you try.

Such—M. would say—is the life you've built.

The crowd parts for the representatives of the hospital. They assail you with questions about your health. Also, your name. You have lost a lot of M.'s blood they say, though they don't know to whom it belongs. But why isn't she here, M?"

I have influenced someone to begin yelling at the driver who hit you because he's been standing there as if only a spectator. He mustn't forget what he's done. I've sent a young man to do it and this should make up for boiling you. He's not armed, but he pretends to be, so as to frighten the driver. I want the crowd more frantic, but they are so used to this. This scene is just a time out for them. However, some standbys have noticed the argument. The driver is a white male; the angry youth is black. (I did this on purpose. Here are two reasons. First, as you're lying there, as this youth is very articulate, you can convalesce in thinking

he's family: he represents you. Second, I wanted to see if anything has changed now that blacks are the second largest "minority" in this country instead of the first—if that makes their voice more like echo, if the anger of it has receded.) The demographics of the crowd are typical for this location—23rd Street and 6th Avenue—someone from everywhere, but those surrounding you, in their unaffected circle, are disproportionately white. Why is that? Do you know them? Is this the "white life" you're always talking about?

One of the paramedics digs into your jeans pocket for identification, tired of calling you "Miss." "You have two French names," she says softly as she tries to slow the flow of blood. She's French; she gives you your names properly. They have a beautiful guttural sound. She stops you when you try to imitate them. "You mustn't move your mouth...there is a fracture, probably, to the neck," she says.

Now every ten seconds she's calling you by your name. She is disturbing you; you would like to sleep now. She's saying, "We're going to put the base board beneath you dear..." followed by your name. (I won't say it. I know you want to remain anonymous.)

What does Sasha want today?

You signal the paramedic to return your wallet to the front pocket of your jeans. She replaces it there, allowing her hand to wander up to the hole in your belly, laying a length of gauze over it.

They've made it so that cars can begin moving north again. By dispersing the outer crowd and turning the big street into a single lane of traffic. Now that the water beneath you has evaporated—how hot is the ground anyway—it's only exhaust that plagues you. Other than your broken body and M.'s lost blood. The owner of the bandana, now forced to stay back with the crowd, shouts from her estranged position.

“Honey...honey? Can you hear me? I have to go now. You can keep my bandana. I work at the Whole...on 7<sup>th</sup>, can you...” But the words get lost. The French paramedic, without turning her gaze from you, yells for the woman to repeat the last words. “Lost you in the traffic hum...” But whatever made Bandana's words unheard does the same for the paramedic's. Except, this is the time when residents come together. This is that city pride you've heard so much about. Somebody from the Bronx starts talking to a Downtown-Manhattaner who then leans on somebody from Staten Island! Everybody sees it and can't wait for the evening report. Anyway, the paramedic and bandana woman get their message across. And finally, a second paramedic stoops to explain it all.

——wails, sighs, silence, then wails again.

The paramedic has just finished pounding your chest. Your eyes open. “Never do that again.” Her voice is gruff, almost passionate. Obviously, she’s gotten attached. A third paramedic wants to stand in, while the French paramedic goes for the ambulance closer. She refuses. She is losing her North American accent—her thick French voice creeping in.

The crowd calms.

They’ve received the signal that you’re breathing.

The driver and your brother disengage.

The woman yelling to them that what they’re stupid—“she’s dying, you assholes,” ceases to yell too.

But your brother keeps one fist clenched.

I told you that if you moved here you would begin to see the deformity in everybody, that you yourself would become deformed. I said, “It will be more than the man with mangled toes sitting there, drunk, asleep, with his mouth open; it will manifest even in the beautiful, even the in-between. Hideously revealing New York living—its pace, its sidewalk culture. How ugly you become at fast speeds! But, I won’t speak to you of ugliness—it’s only at moments, I’m saying—because you’re dying, right now.

**Untitled, Woman on Ground** © Renee Gladman 2004

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belladonna\* books

458 Lincoln Place, #4B Brooklyn, NY 11238

belladonnaseries@yahoo.com • [www.belladonnaseries.blogspot.com](http://www.belladonnaseries.blogspot.com)





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