

be | adonna



#45

Spring 2003



Boston Piano

by
Joan Larkin



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

“Afterlife” first appeared in the journal *Natural Bridge*.

Boston Piano © Joan Larkin 2003

belladonna* production and design, Bill Mazza: www.mazzastudio.com

It is set in Geneva 9 and 36 pt, ITC Calson Medium and Bold, 9, 14 and 24 pt, and ITC Officina Sans 9 and 10 pt.

Price is \$3 in stores or at events, \$5 signed copies,
mail order add 50¢ postage per item.

belladonna* pamphlets are published periodically by **belladonna*** books.

belladonna* 45 is published in an edition of 120—20 of which are numbered and signed by the poet—for her **belladonna*** reading at Bluestockings Bookstore, NYC, on Father’s Day, June 15, 2003, with Minnie Bruce Pratt.

belladonna* is a reading series that promotes the work of women writers who are adventurous, experimental, politically involved, multi-form, multi-cultural, multi-gendered, impossible to define, delicious to talk about, unpredictable, dangerous with language.

Rachel Levitsky, editor **belladonna*** books.

458 Lincoln Place, #4B Brooklyn, NY 11238

levitsk@attglobal.net • <http://www.durationpress.com/belladonna>

Boston Piano

for George Moffitt

1907-1964

by

Joan Larkin

Afterlife

I'm older than my father when he turned bright gold and left his body with its used-up liver in the Faulkner Hospital, Jamaica Plain. I don't believe in the afterlife, don't know where he is now his flesh has finished rotting from his long bones in the Jewish Cemetery—he could be the only convert under those rows and rows of headstones. Once, washing dishes in a narrow kitchen I heard him whistling behind me. My nape froze. Nothing like this has happened since. But this morning we were on a plane to Virginia together. I was 17, pregnant and scared. *Abortion* was waiting, my aunt's guest bed soaked with blood, my mother screaming—and he was saying *Kids get into trouble*—I'm getting it now: this was forgiveness. I think if he'd lived he'd have changed and grown but what would he have made of my flood of words after he'd said in a low voice as the plane descended to Richmond in clean daylight and the stewardess walked between the rows in her neat skirt and tucked-in blouse *Don't ever tell this to anyone.*

Apprentice

I must have been five or six
when we lived in Everett during the War:
Donald could identify every plane
and collected scrap in an old carriage
for we were *patriotic*
and *Bobbe* darkened the kitchen, rehearsing
for air raids. Winter then was like this one,
always night,
and thick sooty ice hid the sidewalk,
and I'd go down to the cellar
behind Dad—I was the one
who stood and watched while he loaded the shovel
and aimed black chunks at the fiery
mouth. He let me try it—
didn't he? Don't I remember the weight
of the wooden shovel, the weight of coal
picked from that heap without light
under the chute. And if he did say
You do it, then that was the moment
I first tried lifting my father's
burden, taking on his work, climbing
down steep wooden steps
to feed the thing that was always there
in the dark with its mouth open.

Little George

stands in his short dress
leaning out of a photo
eyes already orphaned
already opened—blue
dazzlers like the smile.
Four, and already my father.

Missing

his rack of extravagant ties
his flat onyx ring the size of my thumbnail
flat gold cigarette case kept full
till he quit cold turkey seven years
before he smoked again his last year
scarred tennis racket school violin
seized with violent joy
Boston piano loud off-key
Album for Grown-up Beginners
“Nature Boy”—circus turtle he sang to
and kept alive with eggs and meat
bookcase he built me with curved shelves
A Child’s Garden of Verses Arabian Nights
Heidi when I had measles
watercolor Alps to cool fever
“Good morning, Glory” half-sung
accent they never get right in movies
seeds he saved for next year
black Parker pen looped signature
love on dozens of missing letters

An Egg

He pulled an egg from his ear
a silver dollar from his sleeve
a string of girls in skirts from folded paper
made a pumpkin leer
lit a Sabbath candle in its head
made rabbit, monkey, a man
with a hump cross the wall.
Shone the flashlight on his own lips
pulled wide, the mouth of a monster.
Made unholy sounds in his throat
& kept it up
even when I begged him
Stop.

Afterlife

I'm older than my father when he turned bright gold and left his body with its used-up liver in the Faulkner Hospital, Jamaica Plain. I don't believe in the afterlife, don't know where he is now his flesh has finished rotting from his long bones in the Jewish Cemetery—he could be the only convert under those rows and rows of headstones. Once, washing dishes in a narrow kitchen I heard him whistling behind me. My nape froze. Nothing like this has happened since. But this morning we were on a plane to Virginia together. I was 17, pregnant and scared. *Abortion* was waiting, my aunt's guest bed soaked with blood, my mother screaming—and he was saying *Kids get into trouble*—I'm getting it now: this was forgiveness. I think if he'd lived he'd have changed and grown but what would he have made of my flood of words after he'd said in a low voice as the plane descended to Richmond in clean daylight and the stewardess walked between the rows in her neat skirt and tucked-in blouse *Don't ever tell this to anyone.*

Solo

The drive, Boston to Newport,
in slanting rain, the plastic tent,
beer in a plastic cup, my ruined
dress, soaked hair, the solo
horn ripping bottom to top,
its cheerful impatient shriek
poised between schlock and paradise
never heard on any record,
the long trip back, the feeble heater—
me shivering while Harvey Smith,
odd duck of Cambridge, Mass,
pored over his map by flashlight,
the night truly over when I heard
how my father had watched through the window
and thought he knew what he'd seen
as I argued with Harvey, engine running,
then walked up solo, 3:00 a.m., to be punished
when all I'd done this time
was ride hours in numbing rain
one whole New England state from home
and sneak into my father's house
after I'd clapped for Louie Armstrong
live, in the flesh, not even knowing
the half of what I was hearing.

For My Father

I swim the Australian crawl across the cold pond
though frogstroke comes easier,
stare at the fire in case it spits a spark
and sends the roof sky-high,
measure the doorframe and mark where the hammer
should strike, for my father I iron first the collar then
the yoke, sleeves, placket, crawl down the steep
bank and cross stones to where deer drink,
find Orion, gold Venus, Cassiopeia,
hold a match to a needle, dig out the splinter,
dig deep holes in the dirt and plant Bourbon roses,
let the cold be cold, eat bitter roots,
keep thrift in the kitchen, sweep the cellar clean,
kneel in strange churches, pray in alien tongues,
come home, turn on lights all over the house
and sing as loud as I can
with everything I'm still made of.



belladonna* catalog

Pamphlets are published in conjunction with the belladonna* reading series
and are between 6 and 20 pages in length.

Books are \$3 each; \$5 signed editions; add 50¢ postage per item. Checks payable to Rachel Levitsky.

- 2000
1. Mary Burger, *Eating Belief*
 2. Camille Roy, *Dream Girls*
 3. Cecilia Vicuña, *Bloodskirt*, trans. Rosa Alcalá
 4. Fanny Howe, parts from *Indivisible*
 5. Eleni Sikelianos, from *The Book of Jon*
 6. Laura Mullen, *Translation Series*
 7. Beth Murray, *12 Horrors*
 8. Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Audience*
 9. Laura Wright, *Everything Automatic*
- 2001
10. Lisa Jarnot, *Nine Songs*
 11. Kathleen Fraser, *Soft Pages*
 12. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Draft 43: Gap*
 13. Nicole Brossard, *Le Cou de Lee Miller/The Neck of Lee Miller*
 14. Lee Ann Brown, *The 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time/Reverse Mermaid*
 15. Adeena Karasick, *The Arugula Fugues VII-VIII*
 16. Aja Couchois Duncan, *Commingled : Sight*
 17. Lila Zemborain, *PAMPA*
 18. Cheryl Pallant, *Spontaneities*
 19. Lynne Tillman, chapters from *Weird Fucks* and "Dead Talk"
 20. Abigail Child, *Artificial Memory*—vol 1 & vol 2 (\$6 set)
- 2002
21. Deborah Richards, *Put A Feather In It*
 22. Norma Cole, *BURNS*
 23. Jocelyn Saidenberg, *Dusky*
 24. Gail Scott, *Bottoms Up*
 25. Carla Harryman, *DIMBLUE* and *Why Yell*
 26. Anne Waldman, [*THINGS*] *SEEN/UNSEEN*
 27. kari edwards, *a diary of lies*
 28. Bhanu Kapil Rider, from *The Wolf Girls of Midnapure*
 29. Rosmarie Waldrop, *Trace Histories*
 30. Tina Darragh, from *rule of dumbs*
 31. Chris Tysh, *Mother, I (fragment of a film script)*
 32. Jennifer Moxley, *The Occasion*
 33. Zhang Er, *Cross River . Pick Lotus*
 34. Tonya Foster, *A Swarm Of Bees In High Court*
 35. Lauren Gudath, *Animal & Robot*
 36. Alice Notley, *IPHIGENIA*
- 2003
37. Caitlin McDonnell, *Dreaming the Tree*
 38. Eileen Myles, *We, the Poets*
 39. Suzanne Wise, from *The Blur Model*
 40. Lydia Davis, *Cape Cod Diary*
 41. Elaine Equi, *Castle, Diamond, Swan*
 42. Maggie Nelson, *Something Bright, Then Holes*
 43. Summi Kaipa, "One: I Beg You, Be Still" from *Was. Or Am.*
 44. Julie Patton, "Car Tune" & *Not So Bella Donna*
 45. Joan Larkin, *Boston Piano*
 46. Minnie Bruce Pratt, *The Money Machine: Selected Poems*

belladonna*books

458 Lincoln Place, Suite 4B Brooklyn, NY 11238
www.durationpress.com/belladonna

