

# BELLADONNA\* 12

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*Draft 43: Gap*

*by*

*Rachel Blau DuPlessis*

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

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“Accidental Necrophilia” is forthcoming in *Fracture*.

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## Draft 43: Gap

1. “On tap, for micro-brews  
--- --- it’s Cock or Moose.”

“What else?” reconstitutes  
--- --- their list “O we have Edge.

-  
“Edge is frail like a Witte.”  
--- --- “I’ll take an Edge.”

-Sallow white bitters  
--- --- narrow flute

is the pledge  
--- --- you’ve just ordered

eyes closing, gummy eyes.  
--- --- Dream of a woman’s

dream of a work.  
--- --- Whose rage is this?

Whose child is this?  
--- --- “answer the dawn will you”

webbing its gaps  
--- --- with ambiguous light

who tried on another plane  
--- --- to write one fragment

starting that, starting out  
--- --- “a woman’s voice is nakedness.”



3. (scabious)

(it cured scabies)

a pink flower

small among the teasels

that fuzz grey

a path is any day, “rough

brown stones cracked and edgy lying

in broken scrubby fields sometimes”

with unreadable stain. But

there’s every position to take—we’re

nicks in the surface—once walled and girled—

“say to myself Frances look at the world”

Pick another little nothing weed

and fix its mixed details

matched to pictures and accounts:

not corn spurrey

not dovesfoot cranebill

not herb robert (“often the whole plant is suffused in red”)

maybe ivy-leaved speedwell (has a red stem only)—

too small even to care about

yet stubborn for its kenning-solid name

with its particular fronds, features, swirls, counts

that flatten inside out

clasping mists of loss so close

and hid so deep

in the broken spine

that pressed down place

where flowers fold:

between the pock-marked pages of a folio.

4. Trailing our fueled-up smog  
out to the horizon upon take-off

unpressurized noise  
and thin metal sheeting

encircle whistling stories from the ground  
pearly up, pearly down

the here: why am I up here  
the there: why am I anywhere

any statement,  
any microsleight,

regular tone or  
so-called foreign

is “an oversimplification of the situation  
we actually are in.”

5. Hunger for the next letter

makes the letters  
difficult. Edge

of silk  
red box

holding

unfinished elements

guttering words

losses of small “its”  
of possessiveness

loss of the it in it’s

only the apostrophe left and  
a small hiss how she left like that

stripped, flattened, averse

flayed down

all in all

how incredibly simple her bad news was  
so that was it.

It couldn’t have been worse.

6. Any corner of any thing  
is bread  
in the eye and mouth  
of desire  
but it's also stone;  
not some mosaic's  
dainty pretty, glistening golden on the dome  
flat green where sheep are done  
counterfactually  
white, but small hard die-hard bones  
and bread's lack-  
ravenous slices  
squeezed. Pellets. Gritty pebbles,  
scatter her.

Scatter her,  
and then gather her back.



7. Un mir zaynen alle shvester  
ai yai alle shvester  
twists of business-  
half their breasts once had  
sequestered  
who could list them  
from the vestige  
azoy vi Rokhl, Rus, un Ester  
names like Rachel, Ruth, and Esther.

8. All oily and garlic nasturtium's pepper orange alizarin  
golden needles  
    buds of coral, claspt close and amber  
    strewn on the greens

    studied nonchalance  
    a salad day.

What did it amount to?  
being there or not there  
a pile of ashes orphaned  
or bare feet sloshing through the shallow part near shore,  
and the teeming nakedness inside, with its  
fervent designs on the word  
    head of one, dead bug 3 parts, 6 legs

things destroyed gapping eyes, while  
"the sacred eye is depicted with wings"  
and "thought can make a sound in the ear"  
for these offerings touch a nerve,  
    touch the backwash  
        of longing,  
            so sing in me  
you tricky manytepid and troping troops of song.

We wanted poetry known for lavishness and brightness  
    such streaky brightness—  
plus minimize dreck  
and the too-pretty by far

we wanted access  
open places out of fierce and solid praxis  
ate our joy and joyous anger---- held our, gripped our laser hunger  
we wanted women  
    back channel me

9. She couldn't attach  
the tags, she strained over valises

strange, it was a check-in as  
arranged, but this was a different kind of

Tag as day;

debriefed.

A ticket a thicket  
she said she was flying  
a tisket a tasket  
no way could you ask it  
she couldn't move  
back, couldn't put her name  
tags to the valises  
of "days" —  
task for task—  
from tags what's to know?

The youngest child said  
ma nishtena  
how was it different  
from other airports  
bags heavier more intractable  
airport call letters  
and transfer interline code  
crossed over, snarled, tracking strips sticking  
tag to bag and bag to tag,  
then a very isolated runway

and the roaring thrust countdown seconds  
before takeoff.

10. ranged  
ne of language  
nger, mean

glot

gns, sighs

o stop  
consider step,

orm of me.

f

r

avine

11. There was  
a phone call one day after  
asking  
for the newly-stark  
by name  
someone  
identifying herself by the exact same  
“I want to talk  
to her” the phone said  
of the dead woman  
because she had  
to track  
bureaucratic  
between—crossed medical  
records, mixed-up  
reports, wrong  
information relayed  
confusion  
to doctors, some tedious-impt thread,

of the same name, so

“Can I talk to her?

I have questions”

the voice said.

12. Only later (one of those  
wake-up calls called retrospect)  
did the receiver as  
who was making that call  
anyway?  
After all, she had always wanted-  
to be organized,  
she had wanted, a point of pride,  
not to leave  
things in a mess—  
she had labeled everything with messages,  
she had set folders stacked,  
she had tacked observations  
`old camera—possibly valuable  
but lets in too much light’—  
onto a lot of wrack:  
why had I—in my disbelief—  
hung up so abruptly?  
The call came in under the radar,  
uncanny.  
But then I realized what had happened  
and wanted—but had gotten no number—  
to return the call,  
to call her back.

13. Go on a long enough trip  
down the time line

-  
tickets used  
itineraries shot

and you're left with these sheafs—  
ghost travel folders, empty.

Now what?  
Now exactly what?

April 1999-July 2000  
to Frances Jaffer and others  
whose “absence is/ Absence”



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Draft 43: Gap. “Answer the dawn will you” is from Frances Jaffer, “Sixty Frances,” *Alternate Endings* (1985). “A woman’s voice is nakedness” (not, in context, a positive remark) from Talmud, forbidding kol isha, women’s voices singing liturgy in Orthodox Judaism. “Say to myself Frances...” is Jaffer, “Yale Bowl” from *She talks to herself in the language of an educated woman* (1981); “rough brown stones,” from Jaffer, “She says try...” *Alternate Endings* (1985). “An oversimplification of the situation...” from John Cage, “45’00”;- “eye” from Richard Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*; “ear” from Kim Vaeth on Jaffer in *H.D. and Poets After*, ed. Donna Hollenberg. “Absence” in the dedication, from Jaffer, “Dictation,” *Alternate Endings* (1985). Donor drafts are the two “Gaps” —Draft 5 and Draft 24.

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