

BELLADONNA* 28

*from The Wolf Girls
of Midnapure
by
Bhanu Kapil Rider*

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

BELLADONNA BOOKS • SPRING 2002

from *The Wolf Girls of Midnapure* © Bhanu Kapil Rider 2002

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*for Cheryl and Summer,
who lent me \$1.25
for coffee*



from *The Wolf Girls of Midnapure*

“Mussumi *lana?*” – Assi-ma. Shots of whiskey straight into the cupped hand.
Even the junglees come, dotted lines above their eyebrows, unphotographed.
Where am I? These are my naked evenings. Two, five....Give me my money.
(I laid her on the ground and tied her ankles with hair. Cut a slit above her
spleen and packed it with mud from the Sundarbans. They said so. Placing the
baked dish painted with eyes at my feet. To wash. In orange tea. My hands.
I said listen. But they, already. Hunched over their golden books and singing,
like wasps.)

Mist rose in cubes. With hard fingers, she tore strips from my spine. All blonde-black fur. All hair from a previous life. They called it submerging. Phenome and problem: In the after. In the rooms with slits in them; canvas flaps; small men with hands to move them, paid for. The Reverend Mother says *dirty*. Dirty boys.

I am a girl, innards blue as, eyes - - I don't know. They said the wolf my mother protected me then fled, backwards into her blood. No birth they said. No mother. (This

is a road.

I walk for days but cannot find her.)

Dreamt

dreamed I had an arm. The cook scraped vernix or matte and saw a shape, suitable for reaching.

Your *arm*. Your *hand*. Your *left*

And sliced them free of the wild animal. Shivering, but I was not allowed to sleep. Drink this she said. Keep walking.

“When I woke up I could hear Assi-ma
 killing chickens for the soup

that would resurrect me

from bloodless states” - - Kamala; a taunt - - *Kamalee!*: gullible. *Idiot*. A person with trust or dignity before objects. Half a girl. Was given green fruits by English visitors:

(To watch: her eat.

Raw mangoes, curd and animal behaviors. Notes on damp paper. June, when they visited. The Bishop Wassingham and his woman; two chickens slit then roasted in a pit. Assi-ma brings them wrapped in tea-leaves, yoghurt, and a red stain. Under the elephant banyan in the courtyard: “tea and crumpets.”)

Presently, the little ones come to scrape and smile; someone has strapped a shard of tree-blossom to Kamala’s hand.

Fizzy-eyed, she curtsies to the Bishop Mrs. White hands with brown spots clap, insert chippy silver into the little paw. Kamala presses and listens. Has the habit, even in a difficult public, of yearning to a roaring at the edge.

Someone’s there. She leaves her body. The Bishop Mrs. pats her arm. The Bishop coughs when Kamala does not retract, shimmy sideways to her den. “A shilling, dear. There you are, my pet.”

But Kamala does not coil as normal children do, but stands, continues to, her arm outstretched, gripping or cupping her prize; eyes turning blue.

It’s dusk. The light enters Kamala at an angle.

Someone is there. Roots grow backwards into plants with hands; vines part slowly, mentioning death. Two eyes. A flesh-sewn breath. Death is brown. She cannot move.

“Some tea, perhaps. Or salts. Darling, your hanky. My water! Kamala! Can you hear me?”

Crunchy. Where the skins are slung, into the indigo. Potatoes. Shadows.

A man slips back, giddy for a girl. A girl parts her
lips, curls her toes into the red dust between chairs and table.

The white-white flutters, crooks to see.

There is a blue wall.

Shimmering solids.

Lions and tigers, she says to the Bishop. *Where is your gun?*

Chart and obligation: A jungle entry.

(Tail Fin. Is last or surveyed. I cannot... *There*. Following, as a hand does, the line of ink. Or rice.

When I was a boy

The sea said

Or I could have No. I saw. A blue forked disappear into the Indian... That morning. My mother: *not possible!* Rolling the rough palm of yam into flour and black seeds. Breakfast. She said no.)

Inland: an exorcism. Some haunch or final muscle sliding back into the green of two dimensions. I walk, slanted, through the jungle rain, thinner and thinner with each night that passes. My wife... a biscuit. A last bit of gooseberry jam wrapped in wax and tied with tree-string. (I leave, for black goddesses.

Tiny wolf skulls, torn from the bellies of wolves, strung around their waists. How fat they are or reasoned.)

It's time.

The sun backed up inside the trees. A temple at the entrance but no gods fed with oil. Where are the oily men? The women pressing marigolds and turmeric into their backs?

A slit in

like water closing over. Flick-possible! Or leg. A shape...

Nothing.

They said I had to go into that nothing. Return with meat or history, particles or a girl. Explain myself to a room of mourners then turn for home, my wife, a garland of red string: berries or teeth.

(Is. Is not. Hesitate

then plunge.)

“We ask her to speak. She does not have a home. When she looks at the jar set before her, mottled and steaming with black greens: words do not come.”

Beneath yellow. Even the precursors - - silver, simple - - didn't.

Wrongness. The taste of teeth. A wrapper of cotton to stop the bites. She knew the day as wrong and begged Kamala to cut through.

The elder, taken. Just shy of a first glittering. (Some shapes above her turning baskets inside out then back again, plying them to her open mouth.)

She says, later. Recognizing the lengths of sounds was a body she carried deep and knew enough to try.

They asked her to speak. She put her hand over her mouth and made a B! Bh! against it, pointing at the bowl of rice near her knee. Here, for her, lovely - - threadiness, manipulation, foam on the skin; they seem pleased!

(A mouth of males, for one month, swirling over her body and she refuses them nothing. For her new egg, she will be a thickened slit and I am not sure how she eats.

Then there are green flashes and eight arms twitch: a tongue testing the air; deity versions of the common spider closing in.)

The Asiatic wolf sees all this and learns how to be a woman. When she mates, the humans say, it is, like us, like the dolphins, for pleasure. This may be the case for the American and European wolves with their lush silver collars but for her, the thin ancestor...Where is she? They can't see her. (The mica males return with blood-legs for feeding. Sleep to one side. Suck and suffer.)

The two girls are sacred to their tooth mother, who makes a circle for them out of her body. In her sleep the forelegs stiffen and trot; the circle loosens; they slip, or are taken. She wakes to the sound of her body exploding. Her good girls, gone.

BELLADONNA* CATALOG

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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*

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10. Lisa Jarnot, *Nine Songs*
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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*

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