

Cultural Daily

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Dorianne Laux: "Fast Gas"

Dorianne Laux · Thursday, February 2nd, 2012

*Dorianne Laux is the author of five books of poetry; her most recent, *The Book of Men*, is published by W.W. Norton, 2011. "Fast Gas" appears in her second book, *What We Carry*, © 1994, BOA Editions.*

Fast Gas

-For Richard

Before the days of self service,
 When you never had to pump your own gas,
 I was the one who did it for you, the girl
 who stepped out at the sound of a bell
 with a blue rag in my hand, my hair pulled back
 in a straight, unlovely ponytail.
 This was before automatic shut-offs
 and vapor seals, and once, while filling a tank,
 I hit a bubble of trapped air and the gas
 backed up, came arcing out of the hole
 in a bright gold wave and soaked me—face, breasts,
 belly and legs. And I had to hurry
 back to the booth, the small employee bathroom
 with the broken lock, to change my uniform,
 peel the gas-soaked cloth from my skin
 and wash myself in the sink.
 Light-headed, scrubbed raw, I felt
 pure and amazed—the way the amber gas
 glazed my flesh, the searing,
 subterranean pain of it, how my skin
 shimmered and ached, glowed
 like rainbowed oil on the pavement.
 I was twenty. In a few weeks I would fall,
 for the first time, in love, that man waiting
 patiently in my future like a red leaf
 on the sidewalk, the kind of beauty
 that asks to be noticed. How was I to know

it would begin this way: every cell of my body
burning with a dangerous beauty, the air around me
a nimbus of light that would carry me
through the days, how when he found me,
weeks later, he would find me like that,
an ordinary woman who could rise
in flame, all he would have to do
is come close and touch me.

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