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Laura

David Braden

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Laura

I am Laura, Alicia, Marianna, Elena, Cecile.
I am all the beautiful names of women.
Curled up in the dark bus, my smell
goes only a small way; I hold it to me
for safety. My hair whispers the curve
of my names, repeats them in Niles of light
and shadow. My eyes turn the neon outside
of Boise into a parade of wishes. Who could resist
this life? God, how I hate the fear in men,
the closet of their names, the hard march
of syllables, unable at the end to open
to anything: Eric, Bill, John, Sam and Eric
again who left me with this child inside.
Eric, even this huddled rolling back
to my mother is stronger than you.
Why must I be a prisoner to my strength?
I could have any of you, watch a million backs
in my mirror, slip my fingers over deltas
of muscle, through the acrid scents
of riverbanks and hollows until my finger-tips
were liquid. My touch could carry sighs big
as trees or boats. I'd pour through workshirts
and jeans, sing myself through sweat
until I rubbed round even years. I'd water
my names until they grew their wishes
through the bones of armies and greeted birds
through the hard thin shells of their birth.

David Braden