

# FIRE RISING IN THE MOON

LAURA ANNE GILMAN

There is a temptation to pretend that everything is normal. That tears do not flow without cause. That memories of things that never occurred are not more real than this moment. That I do not wake in the morning and have to check if I dreamed the butterfly or not.

“Round trip or one-way?”

“One way.”

“Ten-twenty.”

I pocket the change, tuck the ticket inside the wrist of my glove, turn away. The waiting room is sparse, bleak, plastic. It's easier to hose down, when the drunks are roused and the college students catch the last bus back to campus. Rows of seats that fit nobody's ass, too wide, too shallow. Too dreary a yellow for comfort on the eyes. Yellow plastic and gray concrete, and the piles of dirty snow shoved up outside.

She wants to go outside. Feel the chill. Howl at the moon. Burn the air. I hold the reins for both of us. I say no.

To outside appearances, all is systems functional, good to go. A little ragged, a little rough, sure, but who isn't, these days? You're employed, you're alive, everything's fine. Suck it up. Push it down.

Plastic, and concrete, and dirty snow. These things are real. I digest them, their gross nature a reminder. There is the temptation to stand naked and stare into the sky, until it reaches down and enfolds you, sharp and flat.

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Until we blur and run, staining the stars with our gross nature, and the memories-which-aren't are no more.

The doctors have the answer, of course. A small pill here, a small pill there. A tiny dose for the rest of your life. So easy. So wise. So smart. All we need to do to get rid of this shadow in my brain, this second life unlived which chases me like the shadow of a speeding car on a summer's road.

There's always the fear, though. The one the doctor's don't know. Or maybe they do know, all too well.

What if this is the dream? What if this is the lie?

*Butterfly dreams*

*And wakes into man.*

*Who is lost?*

"Boarding now, the 7:27."

A short line, a slow shuffle. Luggage into the belly of the beast, bags shoved into racks overhead. The driver closes the door behind me with a subtle snick, and I settle into the seat, aware that I will not have to move for an hour. Cheek against the frosted glass, pretending that the chill is spreading throughout my body, cooling the cells down, slowing them down. I hallucinate when I have a high enough fever. I'm not there yet, but I can feel it, creeping around the edges.

She waits for me, lurking in the corner of my eye. We take the bus together; she is silent, although I know there is so much she needs to say.

I don't want to hear it. I'm too tired, too full of my own thoughts I cannot say. There is room for only one of us in this relationship, and it needs to be me.

Noise intrudes into my thoughts, distinguishes into words I don't want to hear.

"I swear, this babe in the bar last week, she had to have been like forty. All over me. Took me home, her kid's in the next room, man, she don't care."

Kid himself, two rows ahead. Talking too loud into his cell phone, too self-consciously unaware. I only hope she didn't buy him a drink, too. He might be old enough to fuck, but barely. His parents let him run off to the

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city, come home smelling of sex. So long as he's not learning it out in the streets, it's probably okay. An older woman should be smart enough to insist on a condom, you'd think.

She wants to lean forward, touch his neck. See if he's as hot as he thinks he is. Nobody, I tell her, could be that hot. She thinks that's funny.

Go to sleep, I tell her. Nothing to see here. Move along. I don't want to talk. I don't want to listen.

"No man, serious. They want young guys."

They want cock without repercussions. To a guy like that, being treated like meat is a turn-on. His blood would splatter like paint, taste like turpentine.

Humanity is strange, complicated, stupid. She's getting stronger in the face of it all. I turn my face to the window again, stare out at the black, black sky, full moon bright. The cold of the window may not be enough.

Fire is rising in the moon tonight. I hope we all make it home alive.



**LAURA ANNE GILMAN** has written or co-written four media tie-in novels (*Quantum Leap: Double or Nothing*; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Visitors*; and *Deep Water*; and *Poltergeist: The Legacy: The Shadows Between*), while her short fiction has been published in national magazines and anthologies, garnering her a number of "Year's Best" honorable mentions, and—in 2003—the move to full-time writer.

In 2003 her first original novel, the romantic caper-fantasy *Staying Dead* was published by Luna, followed by *Curse the Dark* and *Bring It On*, with *Burning Bridges* scheduled for July 2007.

More details can be found at her website,  
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