

The Handyshop

Cliff Taylor

For about ten years I wrote a poem a night at the gas station where I worked. In the beginning this wounding, lovely, romantic energy would sweep through me for no reason and it'd stick around for an hour or so. My gas station and the night would ache with beauty, and so would I. After a couple months, when that luminescence would come over me, I'd write a poem wanting to do something with it more than just experience it. I was hesitant that first year, feeling unmanly with the writing of all my small poems; then it became pure soul, a nightly work, a nightly ritual, that MADE ME LIVE. The poems added up into the hundreds and then the thousands over the years. I wrote them between customers, paused when someone came in for some smokes, and then picked up where I'd left off after they'd left. The poems carried me from twenty five to thirty five, became an ark of my life and my people's life. When I left the job, left my beloved downtown ghetto gas station, the thing I really missed was the poem machine of the place. Me, standing in the middle, pen and stolen sheet of paper in hand, the poems coming one by one, endlessly, down from eternity, through me, to live and breathe and sing the human story, trembling and nearly perfect, like they'd been waiting all these years just to open their eyes and blink and finally be.