

N. Claire Askew – Trash Wonderland Issue 1 Submission

At that age even pronouns belonged to Eros

and I wanted any I could be given, burned to be a nameless agent  
of holy sabotage in the way I first understood it –  
a full adult's *you* that I could carry with me  
alone, close or habitual enough to a man to claim *him*,  
being the evident *she*. In that era after cell phones in high school but  
before the handheld moving body, a pulse of color, a grain of light  
meant his text to me in my AP Calc. O immediately-deleted jpegs. *Hey you* –  
In those years still at the origin, the irrelevant first point of contact, I would  
have given up my name to be seen as a person and not a teenage girl,  
to be taken in by someone who had read books I hadn't and who had  
those lines on the hips I didn't know what to call but knew,  
Adonis belt, or, I later learned, cum gutters –  
what announced itself was a direction I could turn and be turned.  
If a grown man from the mountains had bathed in the Ganges, all body,  
and wanted to taste me, if some grad student in Jesus sandals traced the outline  
of his hand onto paper and mailed it to me in his old ethics textbook  
(it is not lost on me from here) it meant something corroborative  
to the certain prophet I knew lived in my body. Condemned to the hometown,  
they let me practice dissolve, cup my hands around extant sparks.  
I had earned a plane to Cambridge and an unencumbered presence,  
had hungered for any jargon I could find. I thought they invented it.  
Thought I could invent only through them, could bend  
my body into emissary not exile, the first and fearless defector.  
What difference between *kidnap* and *rescue* but whether one wanted it?  
I had burned myself nearly though. I named I with their eyes reflecting mine.

Alice

Lately I'm a master cartographer of places I don't want to be. I knew it'd be better to leave on my terms than wait on theirs, so all it took was enough nights up to my elbows in gritty technicolor ice cream to buy some good boots & a fake & I got out. Everyone who speaks such frantic hunger & fullbelly thanks recognizes each other no matter how badly it's spoken, so at first it was easy, & everything was all kerouac for a while, getting high in the wonderful dirt of the world, wearing all I owned at once, forgetting any words I wanted. Thanksgiving at a popeye's in vegas and god's birthday burning my fingers on a pop can in appalachia. Then one night I was sleeping in a barn with my friends & a kid they knew & woke up to the kid they knew's hand down my pants & I screamed & my friends didn't do anything, so I heard cartilage breaking & then I was running under a new moon with my jeans falling down grimy & the grass slashing at my thighs & I didn't stop running til I met her. She asked me where I was going & I couldn't answer, so she told me, & it was mcdonald's for a bag of fries & a joint in the fluorescent beige bathroom. She got a palmful of honey from the soap dispenser & washed my hair in the sink. Eyes closed soapsharp & I still saw her, her fingers pale as whistled grassroots after, & that was it. A month or two later she's tilting her head back against my leg, attending to her cigarette with her regal eyes & deadly smile between inhales. She says she's not getting wrinkles around her lips, not getting marked forever by a bad habit she had young, so she exhales stretching all the muscles of her mouth taut & round as the rings she's teaching me to blow, balancing it with the pinch of her lips as she inhales everything. Everything has its balance & its opposite you need to keep close. Every clean thing the dirt waiting for it, every dim hazebox of a rest stop its clean white paper towels & lost coins waiting to become fritos & cans of apple juice. Every wonderland its underbelly & bottomless way out.