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Woman

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“She was asking for it.”

When I was a little girl, I was told I could become anything
When I grew up.
They handed me a figure of plastic with a plaster smile and said
“Be whatever you want, but this is woman.”
In an artificial casing with stiff, implausible limbs and a mask
that speaks of the “vacancy” behind. Of the desire
I didn’t know I had.
Stunted skirts, deep shirts, feet molded to the tips of toes
First.

This is us——

walking down the street somewhere between midnight and the idea of
running ahead lest “we should get dinner sometime” because the fact that
speech is happening at all means she’s towing attention. And a woman who
draws herself past the hypocrisy of the expected norms society has
plunged upon her evidently deserves the punishment of suffering such
advances.

“Well, you saw what she was wearing.”
where she was, a club, a bar, what she does
without her own permission, conformation
written with permanent marker downed
with the drinks she shouldn’t have ordered
within the reasonable restraints that a
woman must abide by. Because she made
“when she drinks that much, she should know
what she’s getting herself into” a decision,
withholding her right to say “no.” Apparently.
Walking down a shadowed street, she beckons
with sightless eyes to the mind-reading
wants of those who think her ability to say
“When” and “where” are choices she makes
when she pulls open her
wardrobe.

“She wanted it.”

What? What does she want?
When she sits in her bedroom with her plastic toy box
cracked open with pink leaking out across the carpet like
waves she can’t part and will instead willingly
drown in an ocean because she wished to be pretty.
They said “you’re a girl”
and you should play with girl-child things.
Beauty, red, silence.
Sex.

A mother’s daughter——

wanders down a corridor between dinner and “I’m coming in now;” his face
printed on closing walls that haunt down upon the eggshell steps, echoing
threateningly in her own ears. The quiet isn’t guardian enough as she
covers her small body and waits for the repetition of a nightmare that
pounds inside her screaming bed. The back of an angel above her head and she
wonders why.

“Well, she acted twice her age.”
when they shut her up in a cell because she
washed his face from the walls with a
white flag stained red—inside the sea she
wiped clean in a steel driven scream of desperation.
“Well, her kind of...” hushed “...awareness,
we can’t entirely blame him” because he
waited in that prison. His eyes strangled her
wavering strength—she gave in. 14 years of a
“well-versed life,” defenses gone. The law is
weightless when it comes to babies who “know their
way around” and, when “considering...,” he
was the one that should be pitied. Weakness
without a choice into her minx-child claws. He
was to stand outside, subdue the ghosts he
wiped back in.

“I know she really meant yes.”
When she walked down those crowded halls, self-conscious,  
Watching the pliable self-respect  
that leered at her from behind clay money and glossy  
status established by counterfeit attraction.  
Her cheap infamy can’t compare  
and she knows she tries too hard. They said so.  
But how can she not attempt to alter the natural image that tracks her?  
Strain.  

A child of the system—  
accepts when they ask if she’d trail to their “hangout” because they think she’s “pretty cool.” With the intentions of a puppy born yesterday, she enters into the idea that they must realize her painted confidence isn’t trying too hard, but her desperation to be realized as the person she dreams of. With the ignorant poise of a magazine cover, she opens the door and slips.  

“Well, she’s the one that followed all those boys.”  
with their voices calling, preying on her wishes to be something humanity has written will never be possible. Because “with a nose that big, and hips that wide” she’s hardly the pick of the litter. Welcoming arms stretched, they wrap her up in their pressuring embraces while she vanishes inside the penetrating waves of one, two, three, four…  
Walled up in her bedroom, she still smears writhing attempts across her face. But with words now accusing, destroying those wasted boys’ lives, she grabs the rope and washes away.  

“I swear, she was asking for it.”  

Begging.  
Pleading.  
Mute.  

And the officer says—  

“Well, okay.”  

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SOMETIMES ANGRY IS GOOD  
Kathryn Ashbay  

- A nice Greek girl  
- Madness hidden behind lenses (you know, the hot librarian type)  
- Open legs for you only  

I am not bullet points  
That can be bent  
To your needs  
Sprawled across the bed, on my knees, over the sink  

I am more than 2-D, 34C, my tolerance for alcohol and parties  

My mother planted a seed in her heart  
Of ideas and works of art  
For me…  
Me  

I will not allow some intellectual infant  
Who is afraid of his own dreams  
To be the most significant part of my body, my soul, my self worth or esteem.