

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Elisabeth Adwin Edwards: “Girl in New Hampshire on Fire”

Elisabeth Adwin Edwards · Wednesday, June 26th, 2019

Girl in New Hampshire on Fire

In those days when I was both dark and apparent,
 eyes rimmed with kohl,
 some species of adolescent fish,
 heart beating,
lungs swelling and falling
 through pellucid skin, my desire so heavy
 I dragged it everywhere,
 an almost-visible suitcase,
I let the scarf of my hair
 whip behind me, I believed
 anything was possible. Once
 we drove through the afternoon
drizzle, singing with the radio,
 your hand playing my knee,
 to where the abandoned cabin still stood
 in the woods, rocked by the graveyard wind.
You scraped out the fireplace
 with a rotting plank, opened the flue,
 I gathered sticks from the dark corners,
 leaves wide as hands, paper wrappers,
that with my lighter we set to smoking
 until they caught fire
 and the black stone hole
 bloomed with light.
We lit cigarettes, sat with our six-pack
 as you told me about the blaze
 that had claimed both brothers,
 how you'd tried
to rouse them from their beds,
 how, finally, you'd given up and run,
 tumbled after the dog
 down the stairs,
out to the safety of the lawn,

their two small faces at the upstairs window,
the glass too hot to touch.
And then we stripped,
heaping our damp clothes
into two lonely islands and I, shivering,
got down on all fours on the floor,
begged you to fill every hollow in me
so no room would be left.
You said you would not do
what I asked you to do
because it wasn't love
and you loved me,
but I wept, pine needles sap-stuck
to my knees, my whole body throbbing,
as you dressed in silence,
then doused our fire with beer
and walked outside into the rain.
Why couldn't you,
boy who survived,
forgive my need to feel everything and nothing
at once, you, who understood what it was
to be brought to the knees,
you, who knew burning?

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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