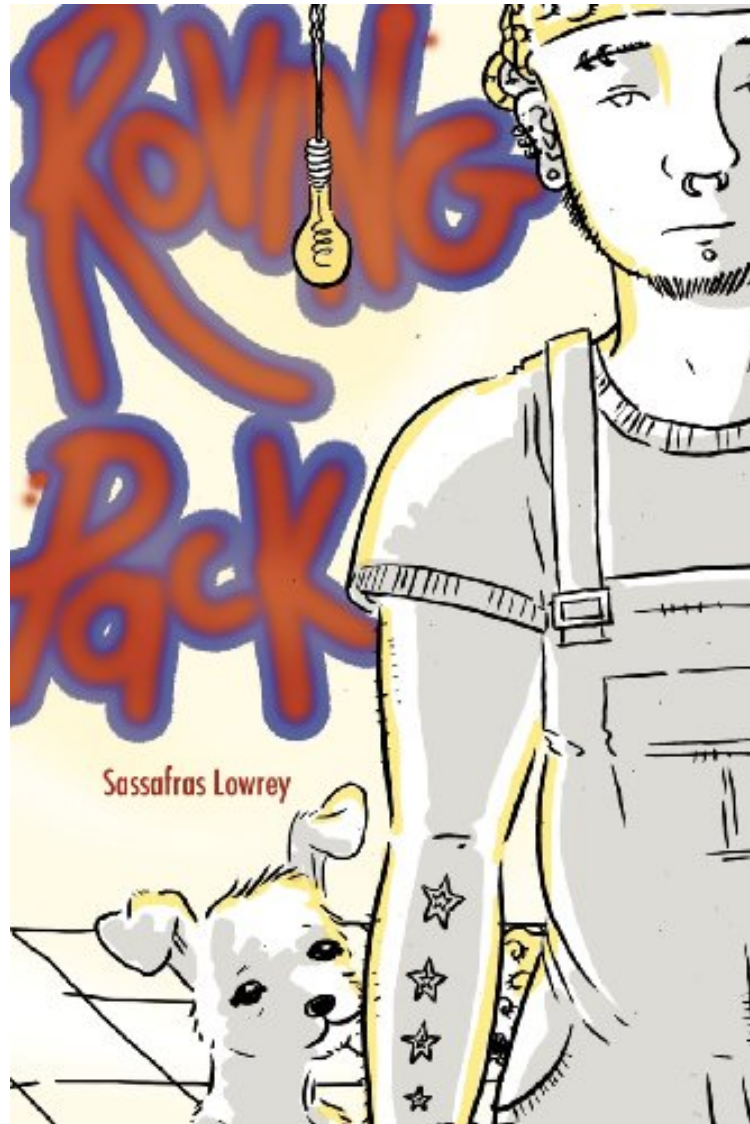


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Roving Pack

Sassafras Lowrey

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Sassafras Lowrey : Roving Pack before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Roving Pack:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Beyond Acceptance Lies Fierce AuthenticityBy Louis Flint
CeciEvery once in a while, I read a poem that sets the hairs on the back of my neck on edge. More rarely, I find a short story that does the same. Rarest of all is a novel that can do the trick. Roving Pack is such a novel.Sassafras Lowrey's YA gender-punk first-person narrative plunged me into a world I didn't know existed. I guess I didn't know it because

I didn't want to know. As a gay activist and YA author myself, I have worked long and hard to create a world in which young gays and lesbians can find safety and acceptance. What I didn't want to face, and what Roving Pack has forced me to consider, was the question: Who are we leaving behind as we struggle for acceptance? Click, the genderqueer hero of Roving Pack, is the answer to that question. At once infuriatingly naive and trusting, and at the same time fiercely - almost subconsciously - courageous, Click searches the crash pads, squalid rentals, illegal squats, and institutional safe houses of Portland in search of a "pack" ze can call hir own. And right there you have your first eye-opener: from the very first paragraph, Roving Pack uses transgender pronouns without explanation or apology. This isn't gender neutral language; this is transgender language. Once you see the world from the inside like this, you realize you can't rely on first names (James, Billy, Grace) or other customary language hooks as a short-cut to understanding characters. You learn, as Click does, to meet them on their own ground, and to value them based on how they treat themselves and each other, not on what role you expected them to play. This is true even when the roles are created by the very community where Click had hoped to find a place. Along the way to finding hir true pack, Click encounters Daddies who have a hard time taking care of themselves let alone their Boy, roommates who trash the space they share, and snobbish Gay Straight Alliance kids who are all too willing to load their own judgements about what is "normal" on top of society's. At each turn away from some tribe that tries to define hir to suit itself - first hir family, then a succession of Daddies, then the wider gay community, and ultimately even hir transgender friends - Click comes closer to understanding and accepting who ze really is. It is to Lowrey's credit that ze keeps the reader wondering if Click will ever find the freedom and community that places no limits on hir authentic self. The one group that does seem to offer that is the collection of stray and rescued animals Click takes with hir on this harrowing journey, a pack that is often more humane than the mercurial and fickle humans. Acceptance is not enough if it means leaving part of ourselves - and part of our pack - behind. This is Click's story, and this is why we need to hear from hir.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Raw, Riveting, Rich Storytelling By Dr. Susan Corso True confessions: I had to call Father Toni Amato to get some help understanding the world of Sassafra's Lowrey's Roving Pack. It's a world of transgendered gutterpunks. The first word, I knew. The second, not so much. Truth be told, I stand outside the edge of the transgendered world. I am not transgendered in any way, but I do bear witness to that culture. I was embarrassed that I didn't understand hir book. So let's stop right here at "hir," a new-ish word denoting his/her without bowing to the gender binary most of us use. Father Toni laughed gently at me and wondered why I expected myself to understand. I finally laughed and said that I guessed I was Margaret Thatcher compared to the characters in the story. He agreed that I was. The irony is, of course, that Ms. Thatcher would consider me, as a femme lesbian, way out there. All this said, everyone in Western culture needs to read this book. I'll tell you why: because gutterpunks, leather families, and trans-everything people are God's children just like Margaret Thatcher. At one point, I was reading and I came to the end of a line in the middle of a page. It read: "...before I got kicked out of the Future" and was continued on the next line, of course, like any other normal book, but that phrase, that one solitary phrase stopped me cold and made me cry. "...before I got kicked out of the Future ..." That's what Click, the protagonist, and all these courageous young people in this story are fighting for: the right to have a future, and, furthermore, the future they themselves choose. Like all the rest of us who are God's progeny, [everyone, no exceptions] these socially anarchistic young souls have what Madeleine L'Engle called "the terrible gift of free will," and they, just like us, want the right to choose their own futures. Duh. Roving Pack tells the story of a group of youth in and around Portland, Oregon. Many are homeless, parentless, and without mooring. They dance together and blend into variations on families that made me see how much pain can be created by social norms--whatever they are. This is not to say that norms must go, but it is to say that norms are limiting, and that those who choose to live beside them and outside them are no less human and often far more humane than those who conform to them. At one point in the narrative, the author describes a white board in the QYRC--Queer Youth Resource Center--that forms the pivot for these myriad souls. It has three columns. Old Name. New Name. Pronouns. Each visitor to the Center declares hir current reality on this board. Some of the names are gender-revelatory; others are not. Some use standard English pronouns; some insist on ze for he or she, and hir (see above). Lowrey delineates four gender aspects more clearly than I've ever seen them articulated although I've known and proclaimed forever that gender is a spectrum. First, there is one's sex assignment, that being "what the doctors said when you were born." Second, there is one's gender's identity, that being "how you feel inside." Third, there is one's gender presentation, that being "what other folks think about your gender." Fourth, there is one's sexual attraction or orientation, that being "who you like." Most of us never even touch more than two of these categories in our entire lives. When I bought the book, I had started to read it when my beloved stole it right out of my hands because, as she said, "There's a picture on the front of a sweet dog and ..." she got a little shy here, "a guy with pockets." To my dearest, pockets signify the difference between her clothes and mine. Hers, according to her, are functional, mine are frou-frou. My mother sewed my pockets shut when I was a child. The thing is, my sweetheart, unwittingly, showed me one of the major themes in this work because of her statement. The dogs. Click even says, "...cuz god knows that little dog [Orbit] is saving me." What about having a dog saves Click? I'd say it's responsibility for someone weaker than hirself. Orbit needs care and feeding, and so does Click, and Click has only Click to rely on for that at, in my opinion, far too young an age. Ze says, "...my whole world is going to revolve around making sure

he's happy and healthy." Click could just as easily have said this about himself, but because of the way our world handles difference, ze can't. Click's relationships with hir dogs not only save hir, they teach hir the only unconditional love ze has ever known. Click aches, "That's what I want more than anything, just to be enough for someone. Mostly, it just scares me how much I know I want and need to be someone's boy, and to have them want to keep me." What Click learns through injecting T (testosterone), and eventually growing past that point in hir process is that ze is not only enough, ze is plenty. In fact, ze is a universe. The director of the QYRC, Gus, "always tells us about how gender is a universe, and we are all stars." Sassafras Lowrey's *Roving Pack* is much more than just a star, it's a guiding light in the darkness of the false binary illusion of gender we've been too lazy to address. Sassafras, I'm so glad you introduced me to Click; ze is tattooed on my heart forever. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. 2013 Rainbow Awards Honorable Mention By Elisa I always liked the idea of a chosen family, where bonds other than blood can be created and nourished. This story really helped me understand some more aspects of life. However as a huge fan of obvious happy endings I was a little sad at the end till I found out more. The writing style was also refreshing. This is a novel that is not a romance, by any means. It is, however, a truly important piece of writing. The story was engrossing, but at first I had difficulty getting into it, because I had never read Trans-gender fiction and was not familiar with the pronoun use, etc. I almost felt as if I needed a glossary, and I'm afraid a main-stream audience would never take the time to plow through the first few confusing "chapters" to find the true reward of this gem of a book. There are a lot of characters in the book, which seem to come and go with the same fluidity as Click's gender. The story was shocking, brutal, heart-breaking and beautifully written. The style was unusual, written as a series of internet diary type entries, detailing Click's day to day existence. It made me cry a couple of times, which I'm sure Click would have hated. I felt as if I knew her character intimately in some ways when I finished the story, yet didn't really have any frame of reference to understand her at all. It is not a love story, but I'm so glad I had the chance to read it. I believe Sassafras Lowrey has written a brave, compelling and moving story.

Click, a straight-edge transgender kid, is searching for hir place within a pack of newly sober gender rebels in the dilapidated punk houses of Portland, Oregon circa 2002. Ze embarks on a dizzying whirlwind of leather, sex, hormones, house parties, and protests until hir gender fluidity takes an unexpected turn and the pack is sent reeling.

"Bittersweet, engrossing, richly textured and redolent of truth - a harrowing but incredibly rewarding read." S. Bear Bergman- *Butch is a Noun, The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You* "Sassafras Lowrey is so much more than one or the other anything. Ze is for sure a vital voice of hir generation, expressing as ze does, many mutually exclusive points of view on politically and emotionally live wire subjects... I find hir work filled with mischief, mayhem, and multiple meanings." -Kate Bornstein -*Gender Outlaw* "I'm not sure that I've ever seen a book that explores the intoxication and viciousness of peer pressure in queer lives with such candor. Goddamn this book is brave -- I can't wait to see the havoc it wreaks." Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore -*Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots?* "*Roving Pack* is a rough and tumble, tender-hearted novel that grips you in its teeth and won't let go. A satisfying debut by a writer to watch." Zoe Whittall -*Holding Still For As Long As Possible, Bottle Rocket Hearts* "Sassafras Lowrey is an urgent and vital voice in contemporary queer literature and with *Roving Pack*, a harrowing, hilarious and hip page-turner, ze takes the reader along for a wild and wonderful ride through a blossoming young queer culture" Charles Rice-Gonzalez - *CHULITO* About the Author Sassafras Lowrey is an internationally award-winning storyteller, author, artist, and educator. Sassafras is the editor of the two time American Library Association honored, and Lambda Literary Finalist *Kicked Out* anthology (KickedOutAnthology.com) which brought together the voices of current and former homeless LGBTQ youth. Hir prose has been included in numerous anthologies and magazines, and recently ze received an award from the Astrea Lesbian Writers Fund. Sassafras regularly lectures and facilitates LGBTQ storytelling workshops at colleges and conferences across America. Hir debut novel, *Roving Pack* (RovingPack.com), was released autumn 2012, and ze is currently editing *Leather Ever After*, an anthology of BDSM fairy tale retellings to be released in early 2013. Sassafras lives in Brooklyn with hir family. To learn more about Sassafras and hir work, visit SassafrasLowrey.com