

Fruit Loops and Her

This morning I am eating Fruit Loops out of a plastic container I rummaged out of the bottom drawer. The dishes are piled up in the sink; I was content to find a clean dish to hold the sugary cereal. Fruit Loops were a special treat Mom would buy on Sunday. Not every Sunday even, but if she had made extra money from tips I would be allowed to pick a box of cereal. Fruit Loops were my favorite. Even still I find myself staring at the odd circles of processed colors. The brightness and starkness of the bowl's contents seemed out of place in the dark and dingy apartment my mother could barely afford. She was a tiny woman with dark hair almost always pulled back with wisps flying about. I would walk down the cracked concrete to the small diner where she worked after school; my hands shoved in my pockets and glasses perpetually falling off my face. They were too big for me, but there were no cracks in this pair so I didn't mind so much. Looking back now, I wonder how she would dare let a young child make this trek alone what with all of the seedy alleyways and their suspicious occupants I passed as I shuffled along.

The street outside my apartment window is almost indistinguishable from the one I walked every day as a child. Shadowy alleys are still full of suspicious characters that come and go like wisps of smoke. Only now I recognize some of the deeds for what they are: the drug deals and prostitutes and God knows everything in-between. Not much has changed as I shuffle

along day by day. I still walk with my hands in my pockets and push my small, rectangle framed glasses back on my nose.

She had always loved my glasses. “I never found the spectacled look sexy until I met you,” she had told me one morning, taking them off and placing them on her own small-featured face.

“As adorable as you are, I must say I rock the look better than you.” I teased her comfortably and stole them back, feeling content in that moment. The mornings were cool, much like this one, and we would curl up under my black comforter. I would read her my poetry, and she would bounce ideas for song lyrics off of me. She had found more success than I had with her music. Her indie rock band, Honor, wasn’t making much money by any reasonable standard, but they were at least booking small, crappy bars, that was more than I could say of my success in the writing arena. All I had to show for my efforts was a newspaper clipping she had brought to me excitedly one day of my first published poem. It had been about her. She had smiled wide and jumped up and down in excitement, pride beaming from her face like that of a parent for a child taking his first steps. I think she was happier for me than I was, but I found myself swept up in her antics and began jumping and screaming in elation along with her. In a sense, I looked to her for guidance and approval and as she leaned in to kiss my neck I believed for a moment that I was someone worthy of her, that I was worth the adoration I saw in her icy orbs.

The dim flickering lights from the streetlamps danced on her straw colored strands of hair, and I thought she looked like a woman on fire which was fitting since her presence was continually lighting me up. She almost always wore cut-off tank tops with no bra underneath, and I loved to slip my hand up her shirt and tease her. On those days we would share cigarettes,

kisses, and dreams. The smell of her still clinging to my skin from the previous night's romp, and my overgrown and tousled hair would still be clumped with sweat from the exertion. She would always run her dainty hand through my bangs and kiss my forehead. I would roll my eyes at her sweetness and roll my body over hers pinning her to the bed where we would make love a few more times until she left to work or to play a gig at the local bar. The same one where we had first met. Sometimes I would drag my ass out of bed and tag along with her to watch her play. I would take shots of Jack Daniels and smoke while she played. Her hands caressed the black Fender, and I would grow hot at the thought of her hands touching my body with the same passion.

She loved to wear that faded grey jacket of mine, and I always told her to give it back because I was running out of clothes with her always stealing mine. But she knew I didn't mind. In fact it thrilled me to see her wearing my clothes. It was tangible proof that she was mine and that something as sweet as her could exist in my world. Sometimes we would fight. More for the theatrics and to start our blood boiling than anything else. We both had a bit of a flair for dramatics and sometimes getting angry over the little things, when I said something cold that hurt her feelings or she said something patronizing, was more done for the making up later than anything else.

She always tried to belong with those of us in the underbelly of the city, but she came from a middle class family and no matter how many fools like me she shackled up with she always had this sense about her of not quite belonging. She smoked, fucked, partied as much I did, but somehow it never seemed to taint her. She had a pureness and goodness about her I had rarely encountered. She was tough enough to put up with my brashness and coarseness but soft enough to smooth me out and provide balance. She became a balm to my aches and pains, and I

grew to rely on her. I told myself not to get too used to these days as they were unlikely to last. But as time passed and she stayed, I found myself growing to trust that it would always be so. For the first time in my life, I thought I had found someone worth sticking around for and who would stick around for me.

The fruit loops swirl in their milky prison as I am pulled back from my thoughts. The donut discs are soggy and flat from being left too long. I take a bite, but they have lost their appeal now that I have waited too long to eat. I set the Tupperware on top of the pile of dishes causing them to topple over with a crash. I shrug as the sound echoes through my now strikingly empty apartment. I look instinctively to the stained leather couch where she used to leave my jacket, so it was ready to be worn as we would walk out the door together.