

Just Like That

I jump out of bed and head for the Grape Nuts after the early morning light takes a cheap shot and wakes me up before the alarm clock even has a chance to try. The sun torments through the snarled blinds like an unwanted interrogation. Staring at the ceiling for a few fleeting seconds prior to rolling over and my feet colliding with the floor, I wonder if this is the day that things would actually change. Probably not. Who was I kidding?

Every day that I wake up, it is always just the same. I come from a broken home, so I am stuck with a decaying brain, a catalog of bootleg sneakers, and don't even get me started with the itching elbows. Littered all over the floor surrounding the bed are clothes that smell like they have already been through the work week, even though I don't even have a job. Exercising judgment through the pile, I find a shirt that doesn't seem to be defined by biological secretions to the touch of my fingers. I sniffed it once and called it clean. My socks are always a gamble. I find one white and one gray; both are stiff as chalk. I am better off just buying new ones, so

today I say fuck it and go without. I rock the same drawers as yesterday. They ride up high and pinch my sac too much, but I don't have another pair that isn't in the tub soaking.

I get to the kitchen and grab the cereal box my brother left open sitting on the counter. I poured myself some of the stale Grape Nuts and ate them fast. Not fast enough. They didn't contain any grapes or nuts and crunched for about five seconds before they got soggy halfway through, and that sucked. I scrape the bottom of the bowl with loud, obnoxious drags, chasing some kind of satisfaction that will never quite land. I'll chase it anyway. Fridge time. The label on The Number 8 Ball in the back was half-peeled. I crack it open and it hisses like it is apologizing for being flatter than a bitch on a big wheel. I sip it anyway. It tastes like the expiration of summer as the fall plunges into its place.

My wallet still has a couple of wrinkled bills. Just enough for another forty or some snacks. Not both. I was halfway to convincing myself to just give up on the day and go back to bed or head to the store when the phone rings.

"Yo, what up?" I answer, trying to shield my enthusiasim.

It was Shaggs and he sounded hyped. "Listen, man, I got a hook up on a couple chicks. The one I'm spittin' at is down as hell and the other one's dad is rich. We just gotta get our way out to Wyandotte."

"Wyandotte?" I ask. "That is like thirty minutes away, who do you know that far away?" I scratch my head. "And how are we supposed to get out there?"

"Man, don't worry about all that. If we can find a ride, it is guaranteed, big homie! We are talking right now, on the spot."

I feel the universe tilt on its axis a little. Hope, the dumb kind, starts to bubble to the surface. "Oh shit!" I say. "Let me call Billy."

The line rings into oblivion with nowhere to go. I try Mike next; his old Skylark is exactly the kind of miracle we need in a moment like this for a couple of scrubs like us. Mike picks up sounding like he is only on a smoke break during a late-night studio session.

“Yeah, I got you,” he says, “but I am broke and I need gas.” Shit. I look down at the forty in my hand. It’s the kind of choice that defines a young man. Do I buy another, or save the cash? Mike is on the other line waiting. I take another sip and think fast.

“Hold up, maybe my brother Jump has a few bucks laying around.” That means sneaking into his room while he’s out, and fuck going through his shit when he ain’t home. The last time I did that, I almost lost a tooth.

Shaggs called back. “Nevermind Jay, Legs loaned me a ten. No need to get yourself punched in the head again. Tell Mike to scoop me up on the way to get you.”

I hit Mike back. “We’re golden!”

“You sure?” Mike laughs.

“Yeah, just pick up Shaggs on your way here and he’ll fill the tank. Then it’s Faygo and nedden hoes all day, man!” We hung up.

I lace up my old Pro Wings tight on my feet and head for the door. I step outside, lock the house and wait for them in the street. The air smelled like motor oil and dry grass. I sit on the curb and wait. I wish I had a piece of gum or something. Anything that would wash the nasty taste out because my mouth still kind of tastes like Grape Nuts and regret.

A car passed, it wasn’t them. Then another, with the bumps in the trunk. Then the same car, maybe, passes again. Time seems to stretch as my enthusiasm begins to fade into the abyss by the minute. It seems like the same car keeps driving by. Again. Then my pulse jumps as another car slows and the window rolls down. It pulls up.

“Hey man,” a voice says. I could barely make out the face of the individual speaking.

“You’re out of luck.”

“What? What did you say, man?”

The guy smirks and peels off, gravel spewing all over the bottom of my pants and shoes. I stand there, staring after him feeling the day fold up before it even had the chance to start.

The city hums back, low and endless, like it always did, and then it went silent. Then, it fades to black. I take one last sip from the forty-ounce. It’s warm now. Still flat, and now it tastes like pennies. I guess I was wrong—today was the day everything changed.

I sigh.

“Fuck.”