

New York on the Souls of Her Shoes

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Harley Cooper was eight years old when she fell in love with New York City. Staring at the skyscrapers in her history book, she'd come home and joyously asked her parents if they could go.

They'd said no, of course. Who would take a sheltered eight-year-old out of her perfectly safe suburban neighborhood to visit one of the biggest- and therefore most dangerous- cities in the country? Not the Coopers.

At ten years old, Harley began to annoy her parents. She had developed an affinity for old music, rebellious in her parent's time and not altogether accepted in her time. Harley used her Christmas money to buy a set of headphones. They became permanently attached to her head- tiny, revolution-inducing smiles splitting her lips when her favorite parts played.

Her twelfth birthday came, and Harley finally got to see New York... through the window of a plane headed to Vermont.

"You'll love the skiing," her mom had said.

"New York," Harley argued.

"Why do you like that dirty city so much anyways?" her mom retorted.

Ah, yes. The million dollar question. Why the Big Apple? Why not some nice little town in- well, anywhere! Harley's mother certainly didn't care, as long as it wasn't Chicago or Los Angeles, and New York City was immediately off the list.

Harley decided that her parents just didn't understand the magic of it. Everyone in New York had a dream bigger than their hometowns. They all knew where they wanted to get in life and they weren't going to wait for someone else to move out of their way. Move or be moved, succeed or be succeeded.

There was a roughness and pride of New York that Harley yearned for. Being bathed in neon lights, reborn in crowds that didn't care, growing up again, but this time wildly. The decaying but lively atmosphere. There may be dark clouds, but there were always parts where the sun shone through.

Her parents almost gave in when Harley was thirteen. The family summer vacation was visiting cousins in upstate New York- not New York City and too far away for Harley to catch a bus into town. While her parents were off getting drunk for what seemed like the first time in their lives, Harley went back to the tattoo and piercing shop she'd seen on the way in. The silver stud in her nose the next morning sent everyone packing, the cold anger radiating off of her mother's tight lips making the car ride stiff.

As soon as she could drive, Harley took a job at a local record store-slash-radio station. Harley's shift buddy quickly became one of the most knowledgeable people there- and Harley's boyfriend. He let Harley pick out some of the music that would be played on the radio and showed her how to set it up. Eventually, their boss let them have a segment together, discussing what they liked and disliked about some songs. Harley had the time of her life analyzing her favorite Paul Simon song, *Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes*. She earned the nickname Cake Pop sometime after dyeing her black-brown hair straw-colored blonde and she'd made a silly simile of one song being as interesting as a cake pop. Her boss heard it, remarked that with her new hair, she looked like a cake pop, and the nickname stuck. "Cake Pop and Elephant" ended up being one of listeners' favorite parts of the station.

When her high school counselors started coming around with college search sheets, Harley immediately narrowed her search down. None of her friends were surprised when she applied and was accepted to NYU. Harley's parents were a little less thrilled, though her majors- psychology and audio engineering- were suitable to them.

Harley did her final segment of Cake Pop and Elephant, telling her listeners thank you and letting them know where they could find her next. It was the only bittersweet part about leaving.

The next day she waved goodbye to the suburb of her childhood.

Harley Cooper loved New York. The lights, the sounds, the feelings. And now, standing on the rain-darkened pavement with her face skyward, she was finally here.

She walked into the studio. The producer handed her a set of headphones and a mic. Situated in the dripping blue light, Harley began.
"Hey guys, it's Cake Pop."