



# Cherry Lips

Lauren Butterworth

He met the girl with the full cherry lips on the bus somewhere between stops thirty-seven and forty-two.

Lip-gloss fell from her bag and rolled under his seat. He picked it up, Luscious Cherry, and sat on the seat beside her. She was pale and thin, her summer-brown legs stretched out from denim shorts to faded, white thongs. A brown string anklet with three coloured beads jangled as she tapped her foot up and down.

‘Thank you’

He smiled awkwardly at her and nodded. As he stared at the back of the bald-head in front of him he noticed a familiar beat from the small white plugs in her ears.

‘Someday,’ he said to her.

She smiled and nodded. ‘A Strokes fan?’

'I am.'

She pulled out her left earphone and held it out. He considered the little white bulb in her hand. Its sister sat planted amongst a jungle of wavy beach-sprayed hair. He shrugged. Reaching for it he noticed the unmistakable scent of cherry.

The girl at home has her own scented lips – blueberry. They are pink and plush and he likes the way they squish softly against his when they kiss. She used to sing some nights in dark and grungy bars with a band of high school music teachers. He would watch her lips round the microphone, the spotlight illuminating their boldness against the pale skin and dark, wavy hair that surround them. They were strawberry lips back then, she switched to blueberry two years before, just after they moved in together. That was also when her smooth flat belly plumped to a small, squishy handful. But he doesn't mind. He likes to run his hand along it because it is soft and supple and bends to his touch. They still watch bands in dark and grungy bars but late nights are early and someone has to drive. Sometimes he gets bored of blueberry lips.

'You'll have to excuse me, I'm starving. Would you like something?'

He watches as she reaches into the fruit bowl.

'No thank you, I'm good,' he says leaning back against the kitchen counter. He considers the cherry lips. Plump, supple. He imagines them to be soft and wet.

'I'm always so hungry after work, plus it's such a long ride home. That's what we get for living out in the sticks, hey?'

He watches her peel the top off of an orange. It curls easily into long strips. He can never make his oranges peel so fluidly. They always come off in tiny stubs and he ends up with bits of peel under his nails. She grasps the luscious globe, a rising sun, and holds it beneath her nose. She bites down deep. A fleck of orange juice lands beneath his lip as the rest rolls down her chin. She laps it up, her tongue curling around the ridges of her mouth.

‘Mmm.’ She offers him the wounded fruit.

‘No thanks.’

She shrugs and takes another bite, settling herself atop the kitchen counter. He is unable to tear his eyes away from the fruit in her mouth. He feels like a voyeur, intoxicated by the sight of her tongue, her lips, the squelching of teeth into flesh. He stares as she slurps and sucks, the full cherry lips rounding the luminous hemisphere as it is feverishly devoured. Her eyes don’t glance up at him until the fruit is gone. She throws the peel aside and jumps down off of the countertop landing lightly on the tips of his toes. Her legs rub against his as she moves across the kitchen.

‘So,’ he clears his throat, ‘shall I just give you the CD or would you prefer me to upload it for you?’

‘Um,’ she pauses at the bin, ‘don’t worry about that just this second. I don’t think I’m quite, well, satiated.’

‘Did you get the basil?’

He has barely passed the threshold of the front door. He pulls his jacket off as he strides down the hall.

‘What?’

‘Basil.’ Her voice thunders from the kitchen. ‘Did you pick up some basil?’

He throws his jacket through the frame of the open bedroom doorway as he passes. He notices it land on the side of the bed, then slump off and fall onto the floor. He briefly considers picking it up before continuing through to the kitchen.

She stands at the stove, the steam of the boiling rice rising before her red-blotched face. She turns when she hears him enter. Cocking her head to the side, her fork-laden hand perched readily above the simmering wok, she doesn’t need to speak.

‘I forgot.’

‘Fuck.’ She turns back to the stove. ‘Bloody typical. One thing you needed to remember, honestly.’

He removes the keys and wallet from his pocket and places them on the kitchen bench. ‘Sorry.’

She cuts across him to the strainer. 'Get the bowls out?'

They eat sitting at opposite ends of the lounge-suite. The television shouts adverts for doors and burgers and multi-vitamins at them.

'Got a message today about Tom's going away party on Friday.'  
He speaks between mouthfuls of stir-fry.

'Oh okay. I 'spose we'll go for a bit.'

'Yeah.'

'Don't want a late one though.'

'No,' he takes another mouthful. 'Not a late one.'

They stare blankly as the news program resumes.

'Good stir-fry babe,'

Leaning over, she plants a blueberry kiss on his rough, black stubble. 'Thanks.'

He's forgotten the texture of fresh, raw flesh. Of the tingle in his fingertips at the flush of hot breath down his neck. Suddenly he is twenty-two, drunk at a downtown bar, anticipating the night before him with the girl in his arms. He remembers how his heart would beat double time when he tried to resist the sweat that would pool nervously on his upper lip. Now, out of his comfort zone, he feels it begin again.

'I have to say, I've been trying for a while to get you here,' she says, taking a tub of mousse from the refrigerator.

'Really?' he laughs.

'Yeah. I tried all my best moves, but you're a tough nut to crack.'  
She lightly taps his forehead with her spoon and edges her way in beside him.

'Ah, here I was thinking we both just had amazing taste in music.'

'Well, we do,' Her foot presses into his own, 'but I cheated a little.'

He feels her hips on his upper thigh.

'I may have Facebook stalked you.'

'Ooh creepy,' he laughs.

'Just a bit. I stole a few bands. But good news, I do genuinely enjoy them. I consider it not so much stalking as a benefit to my edu-

cation.' The tip of the spoon, piled high with fluffy, frothy mousse sits before the cherry lips.

'I guess that makes it alright then.'

'Well, I finally got you here. Good thing too, I was running out of albums.' She takes a mouthful and he watches the line of her jaw as she chews and swallows. She offers him the spoon.

'I can't.'

'Why? It's delicious. So decadent.' She plunges the shiny silver steel into the dark brown sludge and then licks it softly at the edge.

'I'm supposed to be on a diet.'

She rolls her tongue along the curvature of the spoon, lolling up the mousse like froth. 'Why on earth would you diet?'

He laughs at her. 'I like to be healthy, that's all.'

'Well diets are no fun. I suppose I'm lucky. I can eat as much as I want.' She scoops up another mouthful then licks the sides of her mouth. She holds the tub under his nose. 'You sure I can't tempt you?' She stares into his eyes, but he can only see the full cherry lips.

He smiles. 'I can probably be tempted.'

The early-morning sunlight leaves half of her face in shadow. It cuts through the centre, splintered at the nose. One side glows, illuminated by yellow. He can see the subtle hollows of pock-marks and indented pillow-lines, orange freckles and peach-fuzz hairs. Juxtaposed against the shadowed side; magazine air-brushed and imperfections blended; the harsh realness of her face is revealed. He prefers the yellow light. He strokes the space between her eye and ear. Her dark, tangled mane is splayed against the white sheet, framing her face. He lifts himself up onto his elbow. Beginning at her belly, soft and supple, he traces circles with his finger. He feels her muscles twitch as he reaches the abdomen. She puffs, short and loud, and her stomach slackens at his touch. Her blueberry lips part, just slightly. He kisses them as his finger reaches the concave hollow between her breasts. Her eyes open to meet his. His nostrils fill with the sweetness of her scent and he pulls himself up onto her.

Sometimes he thinks he'll always love the girl with blueberry lips.

It feels like a dream. A haze of limbs and smells and images that flicker before his eyes like moths in the dark. He feels a rush that propels through his body and blocks the thought of blueberry. He is clumsy in the strangeness of her. And so, like a dream, it soon ends. Suddenly the cherry tastes of ash. It lingers on the tip of his tongue. He scrapes his teeth along the tip then spits. Looking at the rake of white that lies beside him, he runs his eye along the line of jutting rib bones to the sunken hollow of her belly. He can't help but picture the belly at home, like a soft, smooth pillow. Normally he would run his hand along it. He's afraid of the depth of this one.

'So I'm just gonna leave you the CD okay?'

'Thanks.'

He pulls on his trousers and fastens his belt. It snaps shut. 'Well I should ...' He pulls on his shirt.

'Yeah, if you have to go that's cool.' She smiles and reaches for a magazine on the side-table. 'Would you mind flicking the lock on the back of the front-door on your way out? I would but, I'm kinda comfy here. I might just jump straight in the shower. Thanks.'

'Yeah, sure.' He heads toward the door. He feels as though he is in a dream again. The world begins to cave on all sides.

'See you Monday.'

'What?' he turns as he buttons his top button.

'On the bus.' She is still smiling her bright cherry smile. 'See you Monday.'

'Yeah. Monday.' He gives a polite nod and a flickering smile and closes the bedroom door.

He drags his feet along the asphalt driveway. From the house ahead a single window emits a bright yellow glow. He inches towards it, head drooped, hands stuffed into pockets. At the front door he licks at his lips, chapped and dry, and fumbles for his keys. He feels drunk in the dark, the night swaying around him as he is unable to find the lock. He rests his head against the wooden door


and drops the keys. His stomach rumbles, deep and low and he pauses in his stupor to listen to its growl. The hand that feels across his beltline does not feel his own. It is detached, a disembodied thing that crawls across his rumbling abdomen. It clasps down hard and he wants to be sick. He wishes he could purge himself of the cherry lips.

He picks up the keys from the ground beside him, opens the door, and walks inside. He wipes his mouth and the smear of cherry is gone.

‘Hey honey,’

The sweet voice wafts through from the kitchen. He smiles. He will always love the girl with the blueberry lips.

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Lauren is a new writer undergoing the mammoth task of a creative writing PhD for reasons she cannot explain. This is her first publication outside of university. 

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