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Life is Sweet

by Eva Schultz

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Probably the weirdest thing to come from the commoditization of time travel is the candy. There's the gummy candy with cartoon dinosaurs on the label that says it can show you the Stone Age, though usually all you end up seeing is empty tundra. Then there are those chocolate caramels with the art deco labels--they leave you seeing women with bob cuts and men driving rumbly Fords, at least for a few moments while you're chewing. Then as the caramel dissolves in your mouth, you watch the world flash with GIs, sock hoppers, tie-dyed protesters, big hair and shoulder pads, and maybe for a split second, the early 21st century blinks in and out a few times before you're all the way back.

No one pays much attention to those last fading moments, because why would you? It was just a few years ago, not far enough removed to be interesting. The cool part is blasting backward in time, staring around at history while your body lingers in the present, your eyes glowing with a dim blue light until the candy is gone and you have to reach for another one. Which is the whole point, I guess.

Then there are the sweet and sour hard candies coated in dusty white sugar. Most people just throw away the packet once the candy is gone, but I tap the leftover sugar into one corner and scoop it out with my fingertip. Through trial and error, I've figured out how much to dab onto my tongue to go back 12 years.

Most of the time, I arrive during a workday when neither of us was home. But I see your sneakers on the mat next to the door or your cereal bowl stacked in the sink with mine, and I know I'm looking at a time when you were still here.

Once, I saw you taking a nap. You had my old brown afghan over your shoulders, and your feet were hanging off the end of the couch. You'd kicked your socks off and left them on the floor, like I used to complain about. I could see your chest moving as you breathed. I got almost ten seconds with you before the sugar was gone.

After that, I stopped eating sweet and sour. I still buy them, but now I dump out the candy to get to the sugar dregs.

The End

This story was first published on Wednesday, December 27th, 2017



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One day I found myself thinking about Pop Rocks candy--how it starts as dozens of quick bursts on your tongue, then slows down as the candy dissolves, until both the candy and the sensation are gone. My imagination crossbred that feeling with time travel, and I had to scramble for a pen to write down the concept before it could disappear like so many Pop Rocks.

- Eva Schultz

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